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ABOVE: All That Glitters might just be gold for fantasy artist Daniel Horne. For gems and other treasures visit the Gallery on page 62. COVER: Boris Vallejo's valiant warrior duels a deadly dragon in *The Magnificent*.

A Major Fantasy Event!



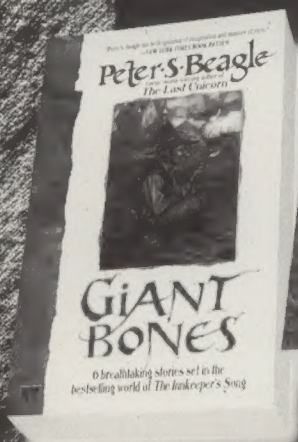
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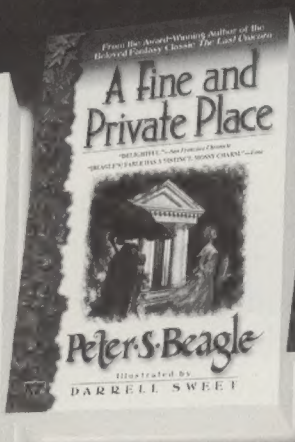
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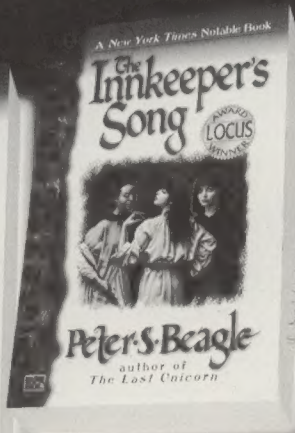
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What do you have to say for yourselves?

Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention, and boy, do I have a mother of an invention for you today. Necessity dictates that I write an editorial for each and every issue of this magazine, and thus necessity would also dictate that I actually have something to say in each and every issue. As those of you who read this column regularly can attest, this is not always the case. I often have absolutely nothing to say, but will go on to say it at excruciating length. That almost happened with this issue until invention stepped in and offered me the chance to kill three or four birds with one stone. I can fill this column and at the same time ascertain that future columns will also come into being, while simultaneously making at least one of you very happy, and concurrently finding out what is on the minds of our readership. (Note the fine editorial ability to come up with three different ways to say "at the same time.")

So I am therefore announcing our first-ever real contest. (Yes, I had a somewhat confusing, apparently, short story "contest" some time back, but forget that for now.) Here's the deal: I want to know what's on your minds. What do you think of the fantasy field? The SF field? Life, school, this magazine, the other readers, society in general, millennial cults, the Y2K bug... whatever, as long as you think it would be of general interest to the readership of this magazine. As you may know from the letters column, we are a broad-based bunch, with interests all over the map, though I think that an essay on, say, the NATO bombing of Belgrade might be pushing the envelope a bit.

The rules are simple: Write me a guest editorial, no longer than 1,000 words (that's approximately five pages double spaced). Mail it to *Realms of Fantasy*, Edi-

torial Contest, PO Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Entries must be typed and double spaced on regular paper—no E-mail entries, no entries on erasable paper—and on the first page should appear your name, address, phone number, and E-mail address, as well as the title. Untyped and/or single-spaced entries will be discarded unread. Only the winning entries will be acknowledged and no entries will be returned, so don't bother with the self-addressed stamped envelope this time. There will be one Grand Prize winner and three runners-up. (I hope ...) The Grand Prize will be (whoopie!) publication as a guest editorial and a free year's subscription to this magazine. Runners-up will receive publication as guest editorials. I will judge all entries personally, on writing clarity, organization, and overall interest to the readership. The deadline for entries is October 26, 1999. No entries received after that date will be considered.

How can you know what the readership will find interesting? Well, read the magazine, read the letters column, and look in the mirror. You are the readership. Are you a systems analyst who goes to SCA meetings on weekends? Are you a doctor, a homemaker, a mother, an architect? Do you like crossword puzzles and Irish folk music? Do you mainly read serial killer novels, but like to relax with fantasy every so often? The really interesting thing is, you are unique, but you are also part of a very small subset—that set of people who actually read for fun. This gives you more in common with the rest of the group than you might think. Your opinions will resonate far further in this small cavern than you would expect.

So get going—I'm looking forward to finding out what you have on your minds and how you will express your ideas. Oh, and as always, SPELLING COUNTS! ♪

Shawna McCarthy

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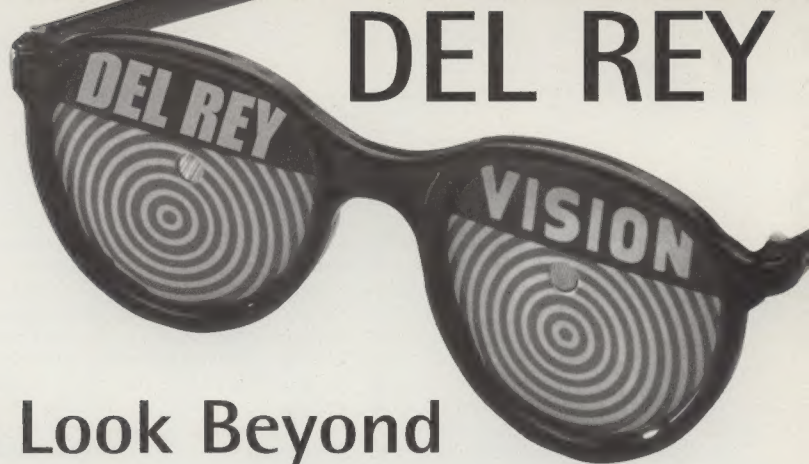
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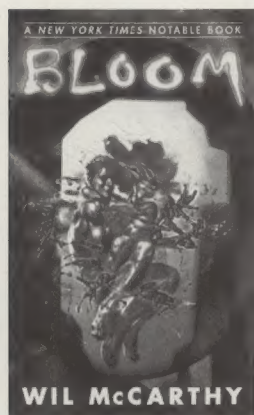
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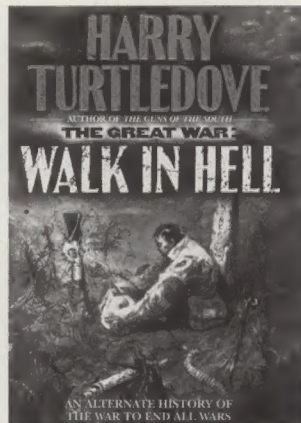
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Dear, Sweet, Beautiful, Marvelous Ms. McCarthy,

In my first letter to you and your wonderful magazine (having been a subscriber and avid reader since ROF's inception) I congratulate Eleanor Aranson, Steve Adler, Rebecca McCabe and you, for "The Grammarian's Five Daughters," the most beautiful story I've ever read in my 59 years! No kidding! The story lives up to and surpasses the promise of the glorious painting of the eldest daughter. Such clarity and cheerfulness! Who knew there was so much LIFE in mere words? Well, obviously you did.

Michael Hillson
San Francisco, CA

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Now you've done it! I never write letters to editor missives. But in this case, I must, I must, I must! I was minding my own business, leisurely paging through the magazine, reading the ads, the letters, Folkroots, when ... suddenly an explosion, the room rocked, my head hurt as it expanded—I finally found a new fairy tale that will be a true modern short classic. I expect to find it reprinted soon in both fantasy collections and English books. This is truly creative writing. Please, oh please keep coming up with these gems. As long as I have your attention, let me also mention I get a kick out of reading the negative letters that criticize your choice of content. The main reason I like your magazine is its diversity. A little fantasy, a little movies, a little horror, a little this, a little that. I can't say I like everything—but I can appreciate being able to read and decide for myself. The only criticism I do have is the stereotypical fantasy depictions of women as nearly nude dominatrix types (in art, not written form). Many of your covers support the stereotype. I really think that a true female warrior, especially fighting with sword and knife, would want as much protection from weather and weapon as possible. The pictures would probably show complete protection from crown of the head to soles of the feet. Yeah, I know it wouldn't sell magazines on the newsstand.

Michael J. Hillen

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I was fortunate to discover the very first edition of *Realms* while traveling in California on my way to a Grateful Dead show. I took the magazine with me, reading it cover to cover while waiting in line for the show to start. I was instantly hooked! What a fine showcase for stories, art, and increasingly, I am happy to see advertising (which must pay the bills and allow ROF to continue and thrive). I am loathe to say "but ..." so let us just say this is where I am about to express

my personal preferences. I MISS Terri Windling's column very much. It was the feature I anticipated the most each issue, with its folkloric explorations of Fantasy's more traditional side. I myself am an avid reader of Charles De Lint, Emma Bull, Ellen Kushner, and others. I would also prefer to see more cover art of the fine caliber that graces your gallery section, rather than the seemingly endless parade of bikini armor and big swords. This art genre is generally confined to the most unimaginative and trashy fantasy novels—does it really belong in ROF?

Michael Babinski

The above readers were not alone in praising Eleanor Aranson's wonderful tale. We received many such letters on her piece. We also received a lot of mail on the topic of racy female-warrior covers ... the most succinct being the anonymous reader who ripped the June cover to shreds and mailed us the pieces with postage due! Also, do not despair—Terri Windling will return. Look for her Folkroots in upcoming issues, perhaps even this very issue!

Dear Editor McCarthy,

I was pleased to read Rebecca McCabe's editorial in the June 1999 issue. I am always amazed to hear that people write letters to complain that their rejected manuscripts were misunderstood, or to accuse ROF of being "too literary," or (my favorite) to request writer's guidelines so they can demonstrate what a good fantasy tale should be. As a writer I've had my share of rejection slips, and there's no denying the disappointment felt when one's brainchildren are rejected. But you know what? It comes with the territory. To write angry/whiny/arrogant letters to editors is in poor taste, not to mention self-defeating. As Ms. McCabe wrote, those "who truly will be writers will find a way ... somewhere, sometime." Our job as artists is to concentrate on doing the best work we can, not to waste time and energy complaining. Sure, rejection sucks, but what else can we do but move on? Also wanted to say that I loved "The Grammarian's Five Daughters," by Eleanor Aranson!

Sincerely,
Ian Rafael

Dear Rebecca,

This is not a general letter to the editor, it is a letter to you based upon your Vol.5, No.5 editorial. *Realms* has two personas when it comes to handling manuscripts from would-be writers. One is the empathetic, often thoughtful tone I hear in the "voices" of you and of Ms. McCarthy. The other is something all magazines have—a reputation for impersonal processing, which is something every

writer fears—"Did they really read it?" Your editorial (and Ms. McCarthy's editorials) convey the first. Your form rejection slips convey the second. My belief is that your integrity is undercut by the manner in which you handle objections to publication. I certainly do not mind the rejection. What bothers me is the lack of anything from you to help me meet your needs the next time I submit anything. In my cover letter to you, this is what I've asked for. In your editorials, you imply that nurturing is part of the process ... no, not nurturing, mentoring. Your rejection letter, on the other hand, could have been written by a Fortune 500 magazine. To paraphrase ... "your submission was either too wordy or too succinct, too convoluted or too concise, too off-the-radar-screen, or a plot everyone's done before." What in this rejection letter actually helps the recipient? A simple sentence, real communication could suffice. Due to your volume, an aspiring writer wouldn't expect any more than that. It would help them—and you. To sum it up, you are presenting conflicting messages in the editorials versus the stiff-armed rejection letter you send out.

Sincerely,
Vince Philips
Mechanicsburg, PA

Well Vince, your letter was quite articulate and thoughtful and point taken here at the editorial office. However, we'd like to offer a more general response so that other readers/writers with the same feelings are included too. Basically, some aspiring writers are wishing for a little humanity when they send out their work, perhaps a pat on the back that says "try again," or a word that might sum up what went wrong with their piece so they can "fix" it. That is asking a lot—try reading a story you like or dislike and summing up its problem or strength in a few words ... it takes a lot of time and consideration. A magazine editor is looking at hundreds of stories at any given time—and contrary to Vince's rather romantic view of editor as mentor ... it's not happening here! Do not confuse an empathy with writers, or the offering of realistic advice, with a desire to personally edit and examine every story that graces our desks. Writing is hard work ... just having a computer with spellchecker does not make a person a writer. Get feedback from teachers, other writers, writers' groups—take classes and seminars. These people are your mentors. (Hint: Friends and relatives are not always objective.) We see, and yes, reject for lack of space, so many really great stories—we frankly do not have the time to coax the ones that "need work" along.

Your letters are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, *Realms of Fantasy*, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ, 07760. Or better yet, E-mail to: shawnam896@aol.com

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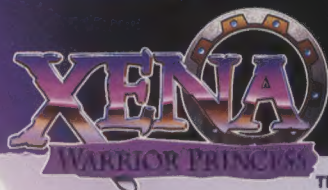
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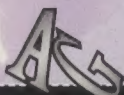
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BY GAHAN WILSON

The Devil gets his due, high-school reunions get out of hand, and H.P. Lovecraft makes a return appearance.

THE DESCENT (BY JEFF LONG; CROWN PUBLISHERS INC., NYC; 470 PAGES; HARDCOVER; \$24.00) starts out with a series of nicely creepy reportage-style accounts of strange and awful episodes that take place on (and inside) diverse parts of our planet to a diverse selection of people: An ex-hippie turned Himalayan tour guide named Ike Crockett leads his seekers after bizarre places into a very bizarre mountain cave, indeed, where they all experience a horrifying encounter with a rather M.R. Jamesian tattooed mummy resulting in ghastly death for Ike's charges and a horrendous and lasting transformation for himself; the heroic and charismatic Major Elias Branch steps from his chopper into a strangely stirring Bosnian graveyard and is only just saved from an

approaching horde of monsters by a barrage of friendly fire so fierce it dramatically deforms him for life; a nun named Ah doing service in a Kalahari leper colony is unceremoniously plucked from her duties by a patrol of tough but obviously frightened soldiers moments after she's lovingly been given a charm made from the scrotum of a butchered corpse by her leperous charges; and the Jesuit Thomas travels from the Vatican all the way to Java to see the fearsome image the legendary ethnologist (and former Jesuit) De l'Orme has discovered buried in the jungle earth for centuries only to find its subtly evil face has been carefully cut away and removed.

Cheered by this auspicious commencement, I threw another log or so on the fire (or would have had it not been spring close approaching summer) and cuddled deeper into my armchair, but then I must admit my confidence faltered and I grew more than just a tiny bit worried when the novel rather abruptly switched into a businesslike, blue-printish mood as it almost crisply informed me that these first contacts stirred up a steadily increasing and highly unpleasant visitation of gruesome entities crawling from the ground which led to many battles which in turn led to the international discovery and preliminary exploration of a vast network of caves and tunnels and to the President of the United States' grim, even tearful, announcement that: "Hell exists. It is real.

*This illustration might perhaps lead you to expect a gentle Edwardian tale in Jonathan Carroll's *The Marriage of Sticks*. You would be misled.*



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I felt, and must admit I still do feel, that this sudden change in mood with its speedy and increasingly no nonsense exposure of the book's nicely creepy notion may be something of a mistake as it decidedly did at least temporarily dim my high hopes and for a number of pages led me deeper and deeper into the increasingly firm conviction that the author was about

to show us how a doughty bunch of marines, scientists, and other such sensible and pragmatic types would soon smartly set things right and teach those underground undesirables not to be so foolish as to mess with a decent, commonsensical species such as ourselves.

This effect is enhanced considerably when the mass slaughter of these subterranean upstarts turns out to be so immediately and highly successful that they

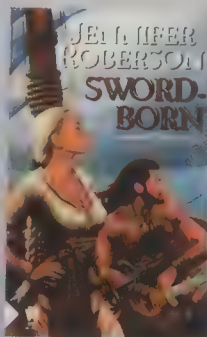
BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

The Stone and the Maiden (Book One of the House of Pandragore) by Dennis Jones, Avon EOS hardcover, \$23.00. In the tradition of Terry Goodkind, this author's first fantasy book will thrill even the most jaded reader of epic fantasy adventure. In a tale that pits unrelenting virtue against genuine evil "there is no guarantee that good will prevail." An heiress to the

throne of Ascendancy and an outlander soldier must search for treasure of untested power and unknown purpose. Compounded by the threat of an evil long ago banished from this world. Mandine Dascaris and Key Mec Brander, lovers and adventurers, must combine forces to save their very world from ruin. Will the price of success be their young lives?

Wizard's Hall, by Jane Yolen, Magic Carpet Books, \$6.00. "A skillful blend of fantasy and school story" says *Kirkus Reviews*. Yolen spins a marvelous story around the young wizard, Thornmallow—"only the most minor of wizards." He must save the Wizard's Hall by learning to trust and believe in himself. Will a sorcerer's cruel beast be more than a match for the haphazard hero? An enchanting read full of both fairy tale and mystery...

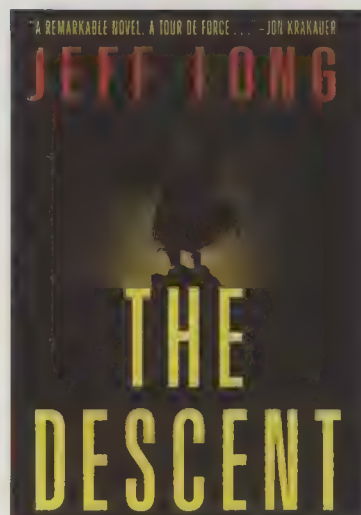
Kaspian Lost, by Richard Grant, Avon EOS hardcover, \$24.00. Fans of Kurt Vonnegut will adore this piece of unique and magical fiction. At the heart of this tale is Kaspian—a sullen teenager with 96 unaccounted-for hours to contend with. His scant recollection is of a seductive, angel-



like being, leprechauns, and his deceased father. "Sexually ambiguous counselors, corrupt Washington politicians, a born-again stepmother, and wacko UFO-abduction theorists would mold him into someone adjusted, acceptable, useful." But Kaspian is determined to defend his memories and emotions as his own.

Sword-Born, by Jennifer Robertson, DAW Fantasy paperback, \$6.99. This, a novel of Tiger and Del, continues the intelligent, swashbuckling Sword series. Tiger, a legendary sword-dancer and Del, a sword-singer fuelled by a burning desire for vengeance, have become allied by blood, magic, nature, and adventure. Exiled, the mismatched pair must face pirates, shipwreck and magic gone awry before their final destination. *American Fantasy* calls Robertson's book "a taut and breathless novel." An exciting read for fans of swashbuckling, highseas adventure.

The Knight, the Harp, and the Maiden, by Anne Kelleher Bush, Warner Aspect paperback, \$6.99. Lady Juliene is the heroine of this romantic fantasy by the author of "The Power and the Pattern" series. Juliene is a young girl who must come of age in a country destroyed and in despair. Evil Lindos is the savage and greedy wizard who has cursed her forever. The curse states she "will never possess anything she herself does not earn." In true fairy tale tradition, the love of a man will break this spell and, subsequently, break the spirit of Lindos. But Juliene's betrothed is murdered—how then to escape this impossible prophecy? A compelling tale for lovers of traditional fantasy, as well as lovers of science fiction.



appear to be well nigh eliminated and the pathetic remnants of their tribe put on the run down into the darkest and deepest rat holes of their realm. I confess I came very close to actually growing bored with these victories and the promises of more to come and was about to set the book aside with a sigh of regret, and would have, too, but for the little wisps and hints that the author, Jeff Long, laid in place and that indicate that he would have been more than capable of mending this rather awkward transition had some editor pointed it out to him.

In any case, never fear, the book soon does come around. The first solid sign that it's not going to unswervingly hold to the Tom Clancy line being the bubbling implications that pop up through our first encounter, along with the nun Ali mentioned above, with a bunch of high-level Don Quixotes headed up by the Jesuit Thomas who meet in a secret gathering held backstage at a major museum. It turns out that this dedicated group of scholars and heroes have a pleasantly nutty plan to track down no one less than Satan himself, since it would seem that recent events do appear to indicate the possibility that he might turn out to be an actual historical figure rather than some archetypal entity revealed in the holy writ of various religions.

Through the machinations of this well-connected clandestine group, Sister Ali is inserted into a dazzlingly well-equipped army of scientists who have been carefully selected and gathered up by a huge international corporation and assigned the mission of thoroughly exploring the newly discovered (and apparently conquered) underground world.

The guiding hand behind this supposedly altruistic and impartial venture is an outstandingly evil entrepreneur who has failed in a recent energetic but unsuccessful bid for the presidency. It would be a

dull reader indeed who would not almost instantly wonder if this vastly ambitious and obsessive fellow might not be plotting a deeper and darker enterprise than the simple scientific exploration that this effort outwardly appears to be. I think it is not going to spoil anything much if I here and now confirm that these suspicions would most certainly be entirely justified.

But that's all I'm going to hand over in the way of tips and hints. I think that at this point the wisest thing for me to do as a reviewer trying to get somebody interested in a book would be to cease going into plot developments and avoid any further discussion of what might happen to the numerous villains and heroes and to the multitude of complex strategic and geographic challenges awaiting them all. Please allow me to let you be surprised when you should be and not to lessen the fine high states of suspense the author has worked so hard and skillfully to set you up time and time again. *The Descent* is a dandy wild and wooly adventure and I am sure you wouldn't want me to spoil a moment of it for you so I won't.

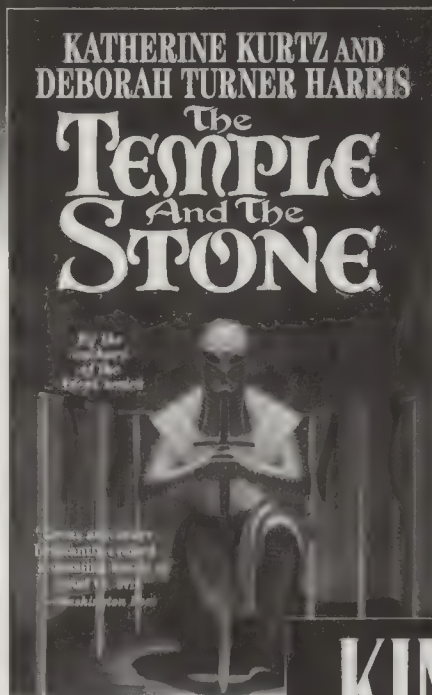
When I say I think *The Marriage of Sticks* (by Jonathan Carroll; Tom Doherty/Tor Books; 256 pages; hardcover; \$23.95) may be the best novel Jonathan Carroll has written to date, I am saying quite a bit since I don't think Carroll has ever managed to write a bad book—or if he has I haven't come across it—and seeing as how the mean average of his work towers so high above the best efforts of all but the most gifted and skillful contemporary writers of grown-up fantasy that the situation verges on being embarrassing.

As with most of his books, *Sticks* starts out subversively by being as unfantastic and everyday real as ever a novel could be. If you are among those sad creatures unfortunate enough not to be familiar with his work, and it is a cruel fact that there are many such, be warned—know that Carroll is as sneaky and as devious a writer as they come.

He will lead you ever so carefully down a road of supposition with as open and honest a face as you've ever seen, his eyes totally innocent of any possibility of guile, his smile as honest and forthright and reassuring as any smile could be, and all the time he is helpfully pointing out the birdies overhead so you won't see the noosed ropes and woven nets and other traps and pitfalls he's softly placed beneath your feet.

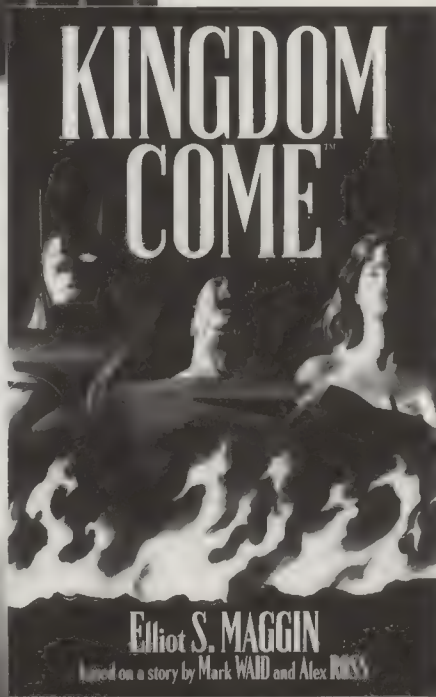
Watch how thoughtfully he guides you tenderly by the elbow lest you catch the fabric of your fine coat or the raised flowers on your pretty dress on that mean looking patch of briar to your right. All the time it's only to make sure you will not notice that the thin layer of grass to your left upon which you are about to step grows over a remarkably tippable rock floating atop a puddle of soft mud, a rock Carroll has put

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there ever so carefully, with so much thought, that once you step upon it trustingly, totally unaware that it is even there, it will rotate with a moist sound as soft as a cow's sigh and send you hurtling down to the dark chasm below with its sharp rocks waiting, their points meticulously poised upward by the author at just the right angle so that they will gouge through your fine coat or your pretty dress when you hurtle down upon them.

At same time, Carroll is as honest a writer as walks the Earth. I will swear it upon the Bible upon the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, the *Complete Tales of the Brothers Grimm*—he will hide nothing from you. There is no beauty nor horror he will not do his level best to show you if he can. I do truly believe all truth would be yours if he had his way. You would know everything if he could have it so. You would be spared no grief, no joy; all despair would be uncovered to your gaze as would all hope. You would be witness to every possible kindness and cruelty. His generosity is boundless.

The novel starts, as I've said, well and solidly within the boundaries of realism, absolutely everything can be reasonably explained. There is a dog making a bed, but the Dog is Doug, the ex-husband of Miranda who gave him that nickname when they were unhappily married. He called her a bitch.

Another seemingly fantastic incident—a terrified old woman seen sitting bug-eyed in a wheelchair at the edge of a busy superhighway can be easily explained, at least partway, by the fact that she is observed in Los Angeles.

I have seen worse than that in Los Angeles. Many times. I saw, as a matter of fact, something very much along the same lines: a blind man with a big white cane desperately trying to scuttle across a wide four-laner before the light changed. Of course, it went green for the traffic going against him way before he made it. Every single one of the cars started right up and some of them barely swerved to miss him. The only good thing I can say about it is that it completely cured me of a bout of feeling sorry for myself because of a TV pitch gone wrong.

Miranda goes back to her old home town where she and Zoe, her girlhood chum, are planning to go to a high school reunion. The real reason for this dangerous expedition is that each woman harbors the flickering hope that a long rejected, but still ambiguously remembered, lover from the days when they were seniors 18 years ago might turn up at the reunion in an available condition. Zoe's old flame was the captain of the football team; Miranda's the baddest boy in school.

Of course I have no intention of telling you what happens at the post-prom party,

nor do I wish to defang or in any way neutralize any of the varyingly powerful bear traps Carroll has set for you in the book since a major part of his teaching technique—his books are all lessons—is the skilled application of gorgeously designed shocks in order to jolt the reader out of his or her usual muzzy dreaming into mindfulness. The technique's something like the one used in *Zendos* where an attendant monk prowls amongst the meditators with a device built along the lines of a burlesque theater banana's slap stick in order to painfully (and noisily) whack dozing meditators on their backsides as noticeably as possible.

In any case, Carroll's directing our attention early on to the potential dangers and delights of stirring up and snooping into one's prior doings is by no means an idle whim but a highly effective introduction to the book's main theme, namely our past's effect on our present and our present's effect on our future and the many highly intriguing questions such speculation can lead us into such as: Is it all that linear a business and thus a sort of Kismet, or can the present now and then stir itself sufficiently so that it simultaneously changes not only itself but effectively alters both the past and the future?

But, fascinating as all this is, please do not let me mislead you into thinking that *The Marriage of Sticks* is at bottom some

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sort of abstract, intellectual piece of work. Far from it, it's mostly about the heart, about the terrible need for compassion.

And very much about the characters. Carroll is very good at coming across and introducing to the reader a rich and complicatedly interwoven cast of characters. I think, outside of Miranda herself, my favorite in this novel is Frances Hatch, a colorful eccentric (Carroll is really good with eccentrics!) who fled to Prague from St. Louis and her wealthy family in the 1920s, moved to Bucharest with a Romanian ventriloquist whose stage name was "The Enormous Shumda," then lived in the various capitals of Europe, mingling with the most legendary writers and artists of the period and living with numbers of lovers in spite of having a nose which calls to mind the face of a schnauzer.

Hatch, now in her upper 90s and living in a New York apartment on 122nd Street, becomes a friend and ally of Miranda, generous enough to give her a charming country house in a little town upstate called Crane's View. The little old place is delightful in every way but when Miranda enters the empty dwelling, puzzled by the long abandoned place having such a clean, sweet smell, she finds herself staring at the happy chaos of a children's birthday party in full swing: cake, balloons, plastic horns and all. She is gaping at the happy confusion when she sees a boy she knows will

be the son of her lover and knows it's his party. Then party and boy both vanish in a wink and Miranda knows the house is haunted, but in a most unusual way.

From then on things grow more fantastic and the world and people of the novel begin to show qualities and connections of an increasingly strange nature, though, as is typical of Carroll's lovely books, none of it seems even slightly out of place. Instead of violating the very solidly constructed world we've come to know, the surprising events that arrive thicker and faster only help make the real world realer and the mysterious revelations tend to clear up the puzzlements of day-to-day life remarkably.

This is Carroll's first book with Tor and in the letter they sent to me with it they promise they will take good care of him. I certainly hope that they do and that this remarkable writer—who has certainly been deeply appreciated but not nearly as widely as he deserves to be—will finally get the larger glory he's well earned.

More Annotated H.P. Lovecraft (edited and annotated by S.T. Joshi and Peter Cannon; Dell Trade Paperbacks; 352 pages; \$13.95) is a sequel to the pleasantly scrapbooky *Annotated H.P. Lovecraft* and I'm glad to see it come along. This time Joshi is joined by Peter Cannon but the mood and feel of the enterprise are unchanged. The book is illustrated with a hodgepodge of photos

and reproductions related to the stories selected, there is an interesting and instructive introduction written by Peter Cannon on the stories and their histories and how they fit together, and there is a huge number of footnotes among which I feel even the most informed Lovecraftian will be happy to discover a quantity of tidbits that will be news to him or her. I, for example, never knew that Lovecraft located the artificially chilled apartment of the kindly, but very spooky, Dr. Munoz of "Cool Air" in the same building where his friend, the bookseller George Kirk, used to hold regular meetings of the Kalem Club, that doughty little band of horror writers who were such a support and comfort to H.P.L. during his sojourn in the New York he so cordially detested. Once I learned of this, and that the place was, and is, located at 317 West 14th Street, I vowed I would visit it during my next weekly, cartoon-dropping visit to the city.

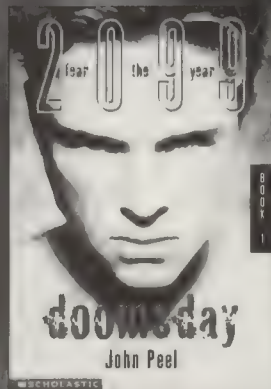
The day was, I am delighted to report, a real scorcher. All the TV weather persons were puzzled at the sizable stretch of 90 degrees plus readings occurring in the middle of Spring, but I smiled a quiet, secret little smile because I knew the thing was a special event kindly arranged by the Dark Gods. They had heard me, grinned fearsome grins, and thoughtfully arranged appropriate conditions for my pilgrimage.

I made my way westward, through

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milling hordes of the sort of perfectly nice people who poor old H.P.L. loved to hate so much, my Nikes leaving complex, cabalistic patterns in the street tar softened by the sun.

I and all about me were sweaty, our clothes soggy, our lungs expelling and again inhaling noxious fumes. It was just the sort of day the dignified but dead Munoz would fear. It was perfect. A child caught my look of triumph and clutched at her mother's dress.

The moment came. I pulled a wedge of soggy notes from my pocket, consulted the address written by me in spreading ball-point ink with the one painted right there on the building in front of me, and knew I had arrived.

Oh, they had tried to change it, of course. They always do. Given it a cozy name I shall not sully this page with, gussied up the ground floor exterior—but it was still right. I reached out and touched the stucco, let my eyes travel upward into the hot glare of the sky, saw the roasting wall of Munoz's top floor apartment towering quietly overhead.

Was there just the faintest, yet still pungent, odor of ammonia floating in the air amongst the traffic fumes? And maybe—just maybe—the tiniest lingering of a long ago, horrendous decay?

In any case, dear readers, whatever, there are plenty of other footnotes in the book and it's highly possible that among them you will find the inspiration for a similar trek.

But, for those of you reading this in Boston, I would suggest being just a little cagey about following the clues given concerning "Pickman's Model."

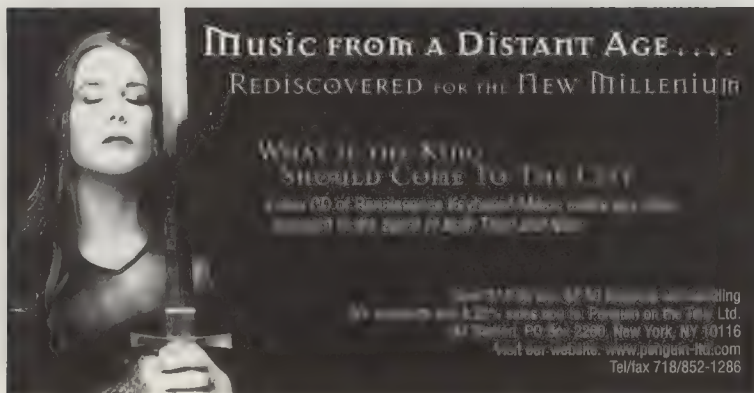
Gahan Wilson

Night Tales by John Maclay; Maclay Books, Baltimore, MD; 144 pp.; hardcover; \$9.95

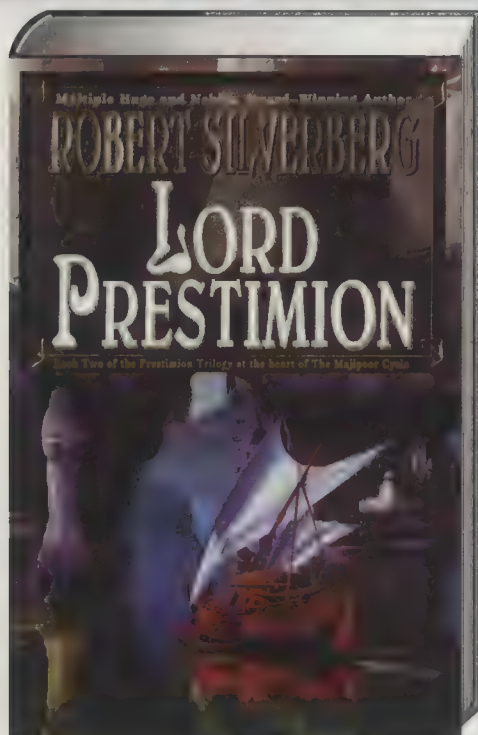
The short-short story is one of the hardest forms to write. In only a few pages, the author must establish an unstable situation and draw us into it, introduce us to characters and make us care about them, and then with an artful twist resolve the situation in such a way that the resolution feels both surprising and inevitable. A good short-short story carries emotional power much greater than its length suggests. It carries the compressed strength of diamond, the memorable resonance of a single, sustained musical note. John Maclay is a master of this form.

In *Night Tales*, 19 of Maclay's stories are collected, almost all of them short-shorts, providing a wonderful example of the wide range of possibilities inherent in this form and proving, contrary to what *Godzilla* claimed, that size doesn't matter. In only a few pages, Maclay can tell a striking, powerful story that will linger in your mind as a haunting presence. I've read

Continued on page 80



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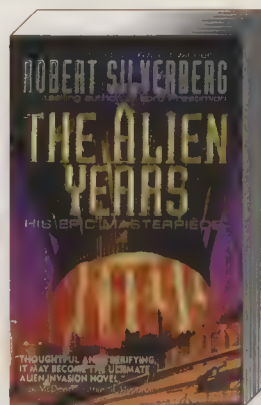
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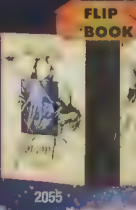
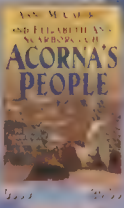
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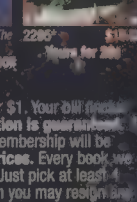
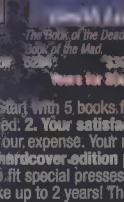
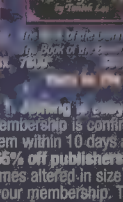
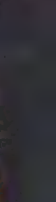
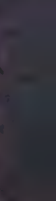
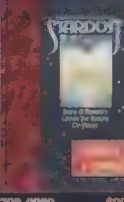


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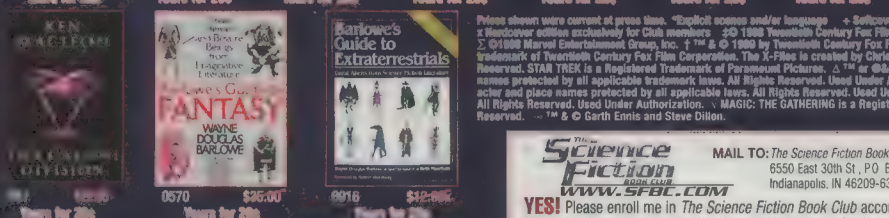
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BY RESA NELSON

Beowulf, the world's first fantasy, makes its big screen debut in *The 13th Warrior*.

SOME OF THE FANTASIES THAT I LOVE THE MOST ARE THE ONES BASED ON REAL PEOPLE OR real events. For example, you probably already know that the fictional character Dracula was inspired by the historic figure Vlad the Impaler. He was the prince of Walachia (which later became a part of Romania and is bordered by the Transylvanian Alps) in the mid-1400s. Vlad the Impaler was notorious not only for his cruel treatment toward his Turkish enemies, but toward his own subjects. His father was Vlad Dracul, which translates to "Vlad the Devil." And the translation for "son of the Devil" is "Dracula."

Another example is last year's movie, *Ever After*, which tells a version of the Cinderella story without magic or fantasy—and, yet, as the movie unfolds, you can see the connections between the magic of the fairy tale that we all know and the speculation of what kind of real-life

event could have inspired it.

For me, the joy is in the speculation. What could have happened in someone's real life that resulted in someone else being inspired to invent a story about it—with a dash of magic thrown in? What is the truth behind the fiction? You know the saying: truth is stranger than fiction. And usually far more interesting.

There is a grain of truth at the heart of *The 13th Warrior*, a new film scheduled for release on August 13 by Touchstone Pictures and distributed by Buena Vista Pictures.

The 13th Warrior is based on Michael Crichton's novel, *Eaters of the Dead*. In the book's afterword, Crichton reveals that he came up with the idea for the book on a dare. When a friend of Crichton's complained that the epic poem "Beowulf" was an utter bore, Crichton argued that he could prove that "Beowulf" was a thrilling story. And then he went home and began to make notes for what would eventually become *Eaters of the Dead*.

He started with the approach that scholars have taken with epic poems and myths ranging from the *Iliad* to the myth of Jason and the Argonauts: that the fiction was based on an actual event in history. But Crichton was concerned about the logic of the fantasy he wanted to create. He wanted to tell the story from the point of view of an eyewitness—and, yet, he did not want to create an eyewitness account. He wanted to find the writings of a real person who had lived hundreds of years ago who could have been an eyewitness to the events that resulted in the writing of "Beowulf". What Crichton ended up using was a manuscript written by Ibn Fadlan, a 10th-century Arab, about his encounter with a group of Vikings. That manuscript provided the springboard for the first three chapters of *Eaters of the Dead*.

The 13th Warrior begins in Baghdad, the center of civilization as the first millennium draws to a close. Ahmed Ibn Fahdlan (Antonio Banderas of *The Mask of Zorro* and *Evita*)

Mythic Norse monsters beware: Antonio Banderas is on the job.



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enjoys life in the city until he's seduced by the wrong woman. Ibn is banished from Baghdad by being sent away as an emissary to a foreign land. While traveling with his mentor and manservant, Melchisidek (Omar Sharif of *Doctor Zhivago* and *Lawrence of Arabia*), Ibn meets a band of 12 Viking warriors. They tell him tales of a mysterious enemy that plagues their homeland. Said to emerge through the fog at night, this monster mutilates the bodies of its victims and eats the dead. No one dares to speak its name out loud.

it would be for a person of that background to come across these gigantic warriors who sleep with their weapons, who are laughing and humorous and also crude and rough by comparison.

"The way Fadlan described the Norse warriors was very compelling and it led me to learn more about them. They were, in fact, a very remarkable people. Extraordinarily courageous, doing these amazing exploits. They had wonderful spirit, great humor, and a profoundly developed philosophy of life. How we think about them today is, in a cer-

Vikings through the eyes of a cosmopolitan Arab.

"When Ibn and the warriors first meet, he is openly contemptuous," Crichton says. "He sees them as almost beneath his interest. On the other hand, they are very accepting of him and what they would see as being his rather effete manners. He is so much smaller than they are, and so, on the journey, he becomes a kind of curious mascot for them, this little man on a little horse."

The casting of Banderas in the role of Ibn was planned from the start of the project. "He is a versatile and very involving actor, and I think he is someone that the audience can enjoy and believe in as they take this extraordinary adventure with him," McTierman says.

When Ibn and his Viking colleagues arrive in the north, they discover that no one has been able to stop their enemy's murderous rampage. Ibn realizes that he must make one of two choices. He can either conquer his fear and join the Norsemen as they seek out their enemy in the black of night—or he can face the terror of being devoured.

Banderas appreciates both the psychological and the physical journey that his character must make. "Even though Ibn is from a rich family, he is still street smart," Banderas says. "But at the beginning, he is also an immature man and he is always upset with everything, overreacting to circumstances. When he meets up with these warriors he later has a humbling look at himself. The journey becomes an initiation process for Ibn into being a man and into being a better person."

The filmmakers made a conscious effort to show the difference between Ibn and the 12 Vikings. When casting the Norse warriors, their approach was to find as many Scandinavian actors as possible. While the film includes actors from North America, the



ABOVE: The ancient warriors knew—you're never fully dressed without a sword! RIGHT: The cast of *The 13th Warrior* was selected, in part, on the basis of size.

An old soothsayer warns the Vikings that they will fail on their mission to fight their enemy unless they recruit a 13th warrior, someone who is not a Norseman. And so it is that Ibn becomes the 13th warrior.

"Fadlan is well known as a historical commentator, because his is one of the few detailed, eyewitness accounts of (the Vikings)," says Crichton (*Jurassic Park*, *The Lost World*, and *Westworld*), who serves as one of the film's producers. "The manuscript he wrote showed he was an astute and, seemingly accurate, observer of these travelers, who he describes with a very unblinking eye and a kind of honesty and curiosity."

"Baghdad was one of the major founding centers of civilization. Even in that time period, they were probably the most cosmopolitan people around. They had extraordinary knowledge and wealth, and they traded with other people, so they would also absorb information from many cultures. You can see how impressionable and fascinating

tain way, the result of centuries of Anglo-Saxon propaganda. Because, you know, they sacked all our ancestors."

Director and producer John McTierman (*Die Hard*, *The Hunt for Red October*, and *Medicine Man*) enjoyed Crichton's novel so much that he convinced him that it should be adapted for film. (The screenplay was written by William Wisher and Warren Lewis.) "I liked the notion that we could do an action film with a different background," McTierman says. "When I was a kid, one of the things that I always found fascinating about going to the movies was the way it could take you to a world you didn't know, to time periods that you can't visit in any other way. Particularly as the world becomes more homogenous, it pleases the child in me to be able to go to some genuinely different places."

The 13th Warrior promises not only to take us to a different place and time, but to a different point of view. We get to meet the



Middle East, and all parts of Europe, two-thirds of the actors are from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Furthermore, the goal was to find big and tall men. The average height of the actors who portray the Vikings is about six feet six inches. Although Banderas is not a small man, the goal was to make him appear small.

"It was like I was working with the Los



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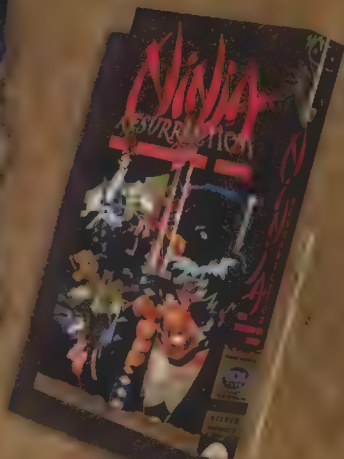
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Angeles Lakers," Banderas says. "It's a good thing I don't have a complex about my height, because even my horse was little compared with theirs. I have never seen such big horses."

The film is also realistic in the way that it approaches the differences in language. When Ibn and his mentor Melchisidek first encounter the Vikings, they have to search for a way to communicate with them. By fishing for a language that they might have in common, they eventually find out that Melchisidek and one of the Vikings both speak some Latin. For some time in the film, Ibn can't understand what the Norsemen are saying unless he has a translator. And neither does the audience.

"The film doesn't have subtitles," Crichton says. "So there are periods in which you simply don't understand the dialog. This is something that has not been done in many earlier films, and I believe it creates a kind of cone of authenticity for appreciating the adventure."

McTiernan adds, "This is a story about a guy who is dropped into the most foreign situation he could ever imagine. We wanted to keep the language relatively accurate and to use that communication barrier as an immediate way that Ibn and the audience feel thrown into this strange and foreign adventure."

In fact, the details of this strange and foreign adventure were created from scratch. The filmmakers did extensive research of the time period. They became so invested in making the details look right that they used similar materials and means of construction for the environment and clothing used in the film. And, at the same time, they took some liberties when they felt it was appropriate.

"The designs for the buildings and the costumes and the weapons used are not all exactly historically accurate," says Crichton. "This is, in part, a fable and so our wish was to give it the right flavor and to capture the essence of the time period."

The filmmakers went to great lengths to do just that.

"For the setting where Ibn first meets the warriors, we were looking for a sweeping vista that was plausibly out of Central Asia, a thousand years ago," McTiernan says. "I was looking for a place with no power lines or highways anywhere in sight."

The setting he chose contains one of the rarest ecosystems in Canada. In order to cause as little impact to the environment as possible, and because no roads to the location existed, everything had to be brought in by helicopter: construction materials, set dressing, props, camera gear, actors, horses, and crew. Plus 25 camels.

The camels were collected from zoos and game farms across Canada. But because the camels were used to living under sedentary conditions, none of them had walked more than half a mile in a month.



ABOVE: An Arab warrior searches for Norse monsters on the plains of Western Canada.

Wrangler John Scott explains that the camel trainers took the camels to a race track to get them in shape. "They started them out with about three laps, and eventually got them up to 20 laps. It's like conditioning an athlete. You have to get their respiratory systems and their legs in shape in order to handle the action in the film."

Another important step was finding a filming location for the Norsemen's home settlement. McTiernan had envisioned the settlement being in the midst of a rain forest, surrounded by huge trees. Modern-day Norway, covered with farms, didn't fit his vision of what it must have looked like in the past. So he scouted the Pacific Northwest and found what he was looking for on Vancouver Island: a 200-acre site covered with old-growth forests of cedar and fir trees, and a 20-acre area that recently had been harvested.

"The location was surrounded by 50 miles of forest in every direction, and that was the world I was trying to depict," McTiernan says. "These humans' homes existed in a tiny pocket in the middle of a vast, unknown, frightening, and probably dangerous world."

More than 200 carpenters spent 13 weeks constructing the Great Hall, the main log longhouse of the settlement, which is surrounded by village dwellings.

"The scope of this film is amazing in terms of the wardrobe and the weapons and buildings that had to be created," says producer Ned Dowd (*The Three Musketeers*, *Angels in the Outfield*, and *While You Were Sleeping*). "None of these things exist. The challenge was not only to have the articles made, but to create the workshops for wardrobe, props, set dressing, and other artisans to create the quantities we needed."

Wardrobe is a significant element of *The 13th Warrior*. Costume designer Kate Harrington and her co-designers took on the enormous task of researching, designing, and creating hundreds of costumes to reflect the different cultures that the characters come from.

"Every costume in this film was handmade," Harrington says. "Every single piece was started with cloth that would have been available in that time period, and then sewn together by our team. Nothing was purchased from a costume house. All the fabrics were dyed and hand sewn. We even had people making our own chain-mail armor, the flexible armor made of joined metal rings. It took three days just to make the front panel of Antonio's armor, and it was done with the same technique used a thousand years ago. The shoes the warriors wore were also made by a cobbler in the authentic style of the times."

Co-designer Sandi Blackie describes to just what lengths the costumers were willing to go. "Even the wools that we got were treated with acids to make the colors correct for the time period. We created turbans and flowing dresses, leather skirts, and used gold embroidery, canvases, silks, brocades, and every imaginable resource we could find and invent."

Just as the actors were appropriately clothed, they were also appropriately armed.

Crichton explains the importance of the weapons. "This was a time when a weapon was an essential thing. If you were a trader and you went to different places, you had to be able to fight or you would die."

Nearly 60 people worked to create the props for *The 13th Warrior*. Propmaster Grant Swain headed up an enormous department of craftspeople. "The shovels and weapons and hammers and maces were forged by blacksmiths," Swain says. "We created individual saddles and swords and shields for each of the warriors to make them distinctive and fitting with their characters. The bridles and the tack for their horses also had to be custom made."

In order to portray skilled warriors, the actors worked together for four weeks of training in swordsmanship and horseback riding. This included learning how to handle English Shire horses, which were chosen specifically for the big and tall Norse warriors.

"(The horses) look like Clydesdales, but they are actually Shire horses," McTiernan says. "They were bred to carry men in armor, which means these are big horses, and they can handle a lot of weight. Nobody rides these horses anymore, and, aside from the three I own personally, there was no one around to train them. So we had to find the horses and then break them to ride, as well. As it turns out, they're wonderfully great riding horses."

"It was fortunate that the actors were able to spend time together during pre-production," Crichton adds. "The activities helped them to form into a group before we even began filming."

The filmmakers had their own Viking
Continued on page 79

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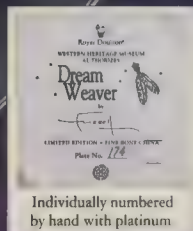


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What does *Sleeping Beauty* mean to me—and you?

THIS PAST MAY, WISCON 23, A FEMINIST SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY CONVENTION HELD in Madison, Wisconsin, invited Terri Windling to be their guest of honor. They did so knowing that here was an opportunity to discuss the role of fairy tales in contemporary fantasy literature with an editor and author whose own work with fairy tales had strongly influenced many modern retellings. And since we had talked often enough about folk tales over the years (through the medium of e-mail, and in late night whiskey-fuelled conversations in bars from New York to Italy), Terri then encouraged WisCon 23 to extend an invitation to Heinz Insu Fenkl and myself to join her on a panel. Our panel would also include Elizabeth Matson, a storyteller/performer from Madison, Wisconsin, and Beth Plutchak, our capable moderator. It was then decided (with a nod of approval from *Realms* editor Shawna McCarthy) that I would write an article based on the panel to appear as part of Terri and Heinz's "Folkroots" series in this magazine.

With some impatience we waited for the program to arrive that would announce the topic of our discussion. We were prepared for anything: the heroines, the journey, the ambiguous power of female villains from Baba Yaga to evil stepmothers, and the sheer imaginative magnitude of women who for centuries have expressed the conditions of their lives in a wealth of fantastic stories. We were not prepared for what, or rather I should say, "who" we got. The title, itself a gentle irony, arrived by e-mail: "What Does Sleeping Beauty Mean to Me?" A brief description indicated we would explore the relevance of fairy tales and their modern-day interpretations

using *Sleeping Beauty* as our primary model. "Oh no," we groaned. "How can this be?" Out of a stock of brave heroines, of determined and clever girls, we found ourselves waiting at the bedside of a heroine whose talent rested on her ability to ... well ... rest. What indeed did this mute slip of a girl who became the epitome of passivity mean to young, contemporary women eager to claim their own destinies? What did she mean to us, as writers and folklorists who as children had felt emotionally stranded by a heroine whose awakening from death-feigned-as-sleep depended on a Prince's perseverance?

We grumbled. We made excuses about the poverty of versions worth discussing, made snide remarks about Disney, and made one rebellious attempt to change the direction of the panel. Give us *Donkeyskin*, who donned wild furs and escaped into the forest. Give us *Beauty*, whose dauntless courage saved her father, her sisters, and a hideous Beast. Even the mutilated girl of the *Armless Maiden* narratives had more chutzpah when she

faced her tormentors. *Snow White*, that sister in sleep, managed to leave home and learn a thing or two before she fell into her trance. But *Sleeping Beauty*, how she betrayed us by her sleep! Among the pantheon of heroines, even those who married easily in happily-ever-after tales, *Sleeping Beauty's* inertia was almost an admission of failure, of shame at my gender's lack of spirit. And yet, *Sleeping Beauty* has a strength about her that is undeniable. Although she sleeps, she has stubbornly retained her place in our fairy tale traditions, despite our attempts as feminists to chastise her for being so passive. Over the centuries the perimeters of her tale have been redrawn, her dilemma reshaped, her salvation changed—but she has endured each reincarnation with something of her original story intact. In the end, it was *Sleeping Beauty's* own power to sustain her existence, even from her bed, that

Sir Edward Burne-Jones's illustration for "The Briar Rose" shows us the traditional *Sleeping Beauty* surrounded by her faithful court.



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won us over. We may not have liked her passivity, but we had to yield to her enduring presence and salute her tenacious survival.

In the weeks before the convention began, Terri, Heinz, and I began a flurry of e-mails, throwing out ideas and arguments about why this narrative continues to be popular to this day. Heinz dug into the archives and plucked out old versions of the tale that proved to be shocking in their bawdiness and frank in their lechery. The Prince, it seemed, had a past. Sleeping Beauty had a few tricks up her sleeve. We read through the narratives and tried to untangle the threads of the tale's structure. What was really happening? Who was the story really about? Terri gathered contemporary versions in poetry, and mainstream and genre novels. Sleeping Beauty, it appeared, had much to offer our panel discussion on the transformation of fairy tales—from its early variants around the world to contemporary English-language renditions by Jane Yolen, Robert Coover, Anne Sexton, and numerous others.

WisCon is a unique convention. Largely attended by academics as well as writers and readers, it rightly boasts of a very loyal and attentive following. We were fairly certain the panel would be well attended and we were not disappointed. Heinz began the panel, recounting for the audience some of the oldest and certainly most provocative versions of Sleeping Beauty. The first was called "The 9th Captain's Tale," found in *The Book of the 1001 Nights* (translated by Pows Mathers). Despite an exotic Eastern setting, it begins with familiar conflicts. A woman longs for a child and declares, "Give me a daughter, even if she can't endure the odor of flax." Her wish is granted and a daughter is born. As she grows, the Sultan's son is taken with her beauty and begins to court her. Then, in a mishap, the girl's hand touches flax and she falls into a deathlike sleep. Her distraught parents transport her incorruptible body to an elaborate shrine on an island. The Sultan's son, still very much in love with her, comes to visit her shrine. A kiss awakens

the sleeping maiden and they have sexual relations for 40 days. But the Sultan's son cannot remain on the island indefinitely, and eventually he abandons her. Angry, the young woman uses the magic ring of Solomon and wishes for a palace to be built next door to the Sultan's. She also wishes to be transformed into an even greater beauty, unrecognizable and irresistible to her former lover. The Sultan's son is quick to discover his exquisite neighbor and falls in love. He sends her gifts, which she discards—feeding the gold to her chickens and using the bolts of fine fabrics as rags. Desperate, the Sultan's son begs to know how he can prove that he is worthy enough to be her husband. She tells him that he must wrap himself in a shroud and allow himself to be buried on the palace grounds and mourned as dead. The young man agrees and permits his parents to dress him in funeral clothing and bury him. His mother sits by the grave and mourns his death. Satisfied, the young woman comes to the palace, retrieves the Sultan's son from his grave, and reveals her true identity. "Now I know," she says, "that you will go to any length for the woman you love."

What is startling about this old version of Sleeping Beauty is that the tale is about both of the lovers and both of their journeys of transformation. Each one experiences a death, an end to their lives as children. Two sets of parents prepare their children for funerals; two sets of parents mourn the loss of a beloved child. The Sultan's son is responsible for awakening Sleeping Beauty, but their subsequent relationship is not an adult one—it is not sanctioned by the social bonds of the community. When she comes to him again, she is changed—transformed by the fantastic. The Sultan's son, in accepting her condition of marriage, has also accepted that his privileged life as a child must end. When she revives him from the dead, they are now equal and their marriage is one between adults. Who could not admire this Sleeping Beauty? She is a divine bride sprung from the fantastic, incorruptible in death, able to call upon magic to perform at her will a clever trick to test her future husband. He dies and is buried in the earth and her final act of reviving him only emphasizes her creative powers and her fertility. He is a Sultan's son but she, confident in her own power, is equal to him.

Heinz then presented two European versions of the tale from the 17th century. The first, titled "The Sun, the Moon, and Talia," comes from the Italian storyteller Giambattista Basile, published in his popular collection *The Pentameron*. Italian fairy tales were among the earliest versions of such stories to be published in Europe. These old renditions were bawdy and sexually charged (and clearly not meant for children).

In Basile's version (learned from women storytellers in the countryside near Naples) Beauty, known as Talia, falls into a death-

BELOW: There's no point in yelling "No, don't touch that." (Anonymous illustration)

RIGHT: Young brides were expected to live with and learn from their mothers-in-law. This did not always work out. (Illustration by Gustave Dore)



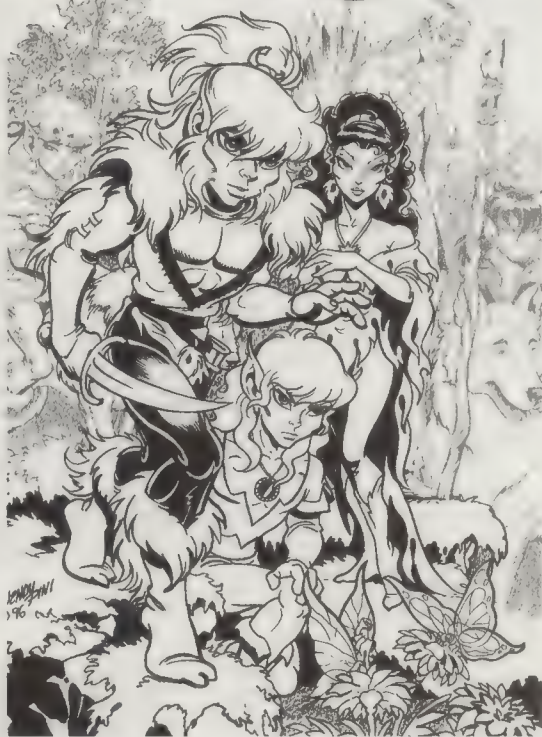
like sleep when a splinter of flax is embedded under her fingernail. She sleeps alone in a small house hidden deep within the forest. One day a King goes out hawking and discovers the sleeping maiden. Finding her



beautiful, and unprotesting, he has sex with her—while Talia, oblivious to the King's ardent embraces, sleeps on. The King leaves the forest, returning not only to his castle but also to his barren wife. Nine months later a sleeping Talia gives birth to twins named Sun and Moon. One of the hungry infants, searching for his mother's breast, suckles her finger and pulls out the flax splinter. Freed of her curse by the removal of the splinter, Talia wakes up and discovers her children. After a time, the King goes back to the forest and finds Talia awake, tending to their son and daughter. Delighted, he brings them home to his estate—where his barren wife, naturally enough, is bitter and jealous. As soon as the King is off to battle, the wife orders her cook to murder Sun and Moon, then prepare them as a feast for her unwitting husband. The kindhearted cook hides the children and substitutes goat in a dizzying variety of dishes. The wife then decides to murder Talia by burning her at the stake. As Talia undresses, each layer of her fine clothing shrieks out loud (in other versions, the bells sewn on her seven petticoats jingle). Eventually, the King hears the sound and comes to Talia's rescue. The jealous wife is put to death, the cook reveals the children's hiding place, and the King and Talia are united in a proper marriage.

Later in the same century, a French civil servant named Charles Perrault wrote his own version of Sleeping Beauty based in part on Basile's story. Fairy tale scholar Marina Warner (in her book *From the Beast to the Blonde*) notes rather wryly that while rape and adultery were too scandalous for Perrault, he had no problems with the can-

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nibalism of the Italian version. Perrault changed the King and his first wife into a Prince and his dreadful mother: an ogress with a terrible temper and a fondness for human flesh. Beauty's children are to be served up in a gourmet sauce, and then Beauty herself is to be butchered. But the kind cook fools the ogress, hiding Beauty and her children and serving a kid, a lamb, and a hind in their places. When the ogress discovers the truth, she becomes enraged and makes plans to throw them all into a pot of vipers and toads. Once again the Prince arrives in time to save his lover from harm—throwing his mother into the pot instead, destroying her.

These European versions show a shift in emphasis from the older Arabian narrative. Sleeping Beauty is still the centerpiece of the tale—but less as an actor and more as an object of power to be acquired, even at the expense of one's marriage and one's mother. On our panel, I noted that the European tales seem to be focused on the men, not the slumbering heroine. The need for an heir (first by her father, and then by the younger King who wakes her) is pivotal here. Basile spares not a moment of sympathy for the dishonored first wife of the younger King. Her barrenness defines her as evil, and her replacement by the fertile magical bride is a triumph. Talia, on the other hand, is able to give birth even while she lies in the semblance of death—making her not quite human but almost a supernatural creature—and making her impregnation (the rape it appears to our modern eyes) not a crime, but the act through which the King engages with the fantastic, simultaneously proving his virility. Heinz pointed out that the children's names, Sun and Moon, suggest a resonance with older cosmological tales and creation myths—many of which involve the birth of children through magical means. Despite this emphasis on the actions of the male characters, Terri argued that the conflict between the women in the tale is also an important element—particularly in the context of women's lives in the 17th century. A new bride, brought to her husband's family home, was firmly under the thumb of her mother-in-law in much of Europe—while in other areas it was the mother-in-law who was threatened by the loss of power to a younger woman. (In France after the Revolution, for instance, a widow lost all right to the family home upon her husband's death, the property generally passing to the eldest son. In such a case, she would have been dependent on the good will of her son—and of his wife, the new mistress of the house.) Fairy tales use emotionally evocative images to engage their audiences and draw them into the web of the story (as Elizabeth, the oral storyteller on our panel, reminded us); the underlying power struggle between the young bride-to-be and the older, established woman was one that would have

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What does this fairy tale mean to us in our post-industrial age? As we examined contemporary versions of the story, we discovered that the modern response to the theme proved to be as varied as the individual artists drawn to the old narrative. In our century, Sleeping Beauty no longer speaks to a common identity, a single icon to shape the female image for new generations. Instead, our Princess finds herself portrayed in many different guises: as a helpless 1950s stay-at-home girl, a bold space opera heroine, an oppressed time-traveling queen, a stoic Holocaust survivor, a sexually abused child, and myriad others. Her tale ranges in tone from unbearably bright to psychologically dark and sinister, reflecting our century's ambiguity toward female sexual roles and women's identity. In 1959, the Disney studios created the animated film version of the story that most Americans know today—simple, bright, squeaky clean, romantic, and unambiguous. This Sleeping Beauty is innocent and demure, her Prince noble and chaste ... and helpless without the aid of a pair of grandmotherly fairies. Perhaps it wasn't Disney's intention to relieve the Prince of any sexual threat, but there is a certain humor in the way the elderly fairies correct the aim of his sword to insure his success! Everyone in the tale is divided neatly into Good or Evil, and there is only one true villain, the bad fairy Maleficent. All in all, it is a sweet but utterly bland rendition, reflecting the values of post-war America: the world divided into Good and Evil; a passive, pretty girl awaiting her prince before her life can begin; and a square-jawed hero who must fight to save her. The raw emotions that gave the older narratives their vitality have been successfully repressed; the ogress mother, the barren first wife, the twins, and other tangled threads have been neatly snipped off. Yet while the Disney film version (and the countless picture books inspired by it) established the story as a children's tale, stripping it of all complexity, other 20th-century artists began to reclaim it for an adult audience, reinvisioning a Beauty who had lost her innocence and her incorruptibility. To Gunther Kunert, an East German poet (whose "Sleeping Beauty" can be found in *Spells of Enchantment*, Jack Zipes, editor), the sleeping princess is a lie, her story a falsehood that drives young men to their deaths in the thorn hedge. But even death is better than the disillusionment of the Prince who discovers her at last, "her toothless mouth half open, slaving, her eyelids sunken, her hairless forehead crimped with blue ... a snoring trollop." In Anne Sexton's poem "Briar Rose" (from her collection *Transformations*), Sleeping Beauty is the vulnerable child feigning sleep in the night while the shadow of an abusive father looms over her. "In due time," Sexton writes, "a hundred years passed and a prince got through. The briars parted as if for Moses and the Prince



Later editions of the tale let Sleeping Beauty recline in gilded splendor, as shown by Edmund DuLac.

found the tableaux intact. He kissed Briar Rose and she woke up crying: Daddy! Daddy!" The poem ends on a sinister note: "It's not the prince at all," says the poet, "but my father drunkenly bent over my bed, circling the abyss like a shark, my father thick upon me like some sleeping jellyfish." Howard Nemerov imagines a young boy's sleepy reaction to the tale in his own "Sleeping Beauty" (in Nemerov's *New and Selected Poems*), while Maxine Kumin portrays Sleeping Beauty at 50 in her wry poem "The Archaeology of a Marriage" (from *Poetry* 132, No. 1). Randall Jarrell, Joan Swift, Charles Johnson, Leonard Cohen, Hayden Carruth and other modern poets have all been inspired by the theme; you can find their work collected in *Disenchantments*, edited by Wolfgang Mieder.

Elizabeth Matson, looking at fairy tales from a storyteller's point of view, spoke about her own approach to stories like Sleeping Beauty. Before a performance, Elizabeth reads as many variants of a tale as she can find—and then, with this range of imagery to draw upon, she allows her own experience and interaction with her audience to shape the story anew. We were intrigued by Elizabeth's take on another sleeping heroine, a story she calls "Snow

White Dreams," suggesting an area of Sleeping Beauty's tale that had not been explored in the past. The drama in Elizabeth's piece occurs during the heroine's period of seeming passivity, *within* her trancelike sleep. It is then that the young woman reexamines her relationship with her mother, who appears in her dreams. Terri and I were reminded of Robert Coover's astonishing novel *Briar Rose*—a dense, poetic work in which Coover explores rich layers of possible meaning in the folk narrative by contrasting the thoughts of the struggling Prince with the dreams and nightmares of the Princess. Both Briar Rose and her Prince are plagued with doubt that they will be able to fulfill the expectations of their emerging roles. Briar Rose's fear of adulthood is described in relentless nightmares of bizarre sexual assaults. She struggles unsuccessfully to wake herself, crying out in her sleep, "Why am I the one? It's not fair." Meanwhile the Prince, hacking his way through the thorns, taunted by the bones of failed suitors, suffers his own doubts. As the thorns close in on him, he wonders on the verge of despair, "Perhaps, I am not the one."

Other authors have used the skeleton of Sleeping Beauty to create larger, more

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I was in the empty boxcar of a red ball out of Chicago that Calvert Raney first saw the hounds. Long sun slatted through the box's sides, the load doors open to the north, letting in sagemint scent off a green climb of ridge. Calvert sat back in the wash of air; when the fast freight slowed on curves, the car's old livestock stench came strong and musty. The slatted sun flicked across his eyes, the rattle-clack rocked him in the place he felt safest, between nowhere and anywhere and didn't matter much.

A low rumble reached his ears. He thought it might be mustangs. Then the air in the boxcar bent and wavered around a strange shadow. Out of this smudge in the air a man

RANEY'S HOUNDS

WHEN THE HELL-HOUND GOES A STALKIN' THERE AIN'T
NO POINT IN TALKIN'.

BY JESSICA
WYNNE REISMAN
ILLUSTRATION BY
KEN GRANING

fell, flopping and flailing like a worm on a hook. In the next breath Calvert saw why. Attached to the man and worrying at him grimly were three hounds. A brown, a dun, a black, pure muscle and sheen. Man and hounds fell out of nowhere more truly than Calvert could ever claim and thumped hard into the boxcar in a rolling tangle of growling and grunting. The brown and the dun hung on the man like leeches, while he wrestled with the black, holding it snarling and slaving from his face.

Pressed back against the thrumming side of the boxcar, Calvert thrust a hand in his sack. Amid the folds of blanket and spare pants, he found the bunched end of the blackjack. He pulled the leadshot-packed leather cylinder out and whipped it down on the nearest hound, the brown one. Impact jarred all the way back up his arm and the dog took no notice. But the dun dog, a grayish, dirty yellow, lifted its head out of the fray, jaws bloody, a piece of fabric hanging from its teeth, and fixed hellfire eyes on Calvert.

Then it leapt.



Calvert brought the blackjack up and slashed it across the hound's snout. The dog made a sound then, a hissing chug, like a steam engine stopped on a grade, letting go its buildup. Calvert's hand ached up to his teeth. He cursed and swung the blackjack back down on the head of the brown dog. That one let go of the man and turned toward Calvert, joined by the dun, springing back up from the side.

Freed up, the man got a leg under him, flipped and slammed the black hound down, then, with a strangled yell, "ayaahh!" threw the dog out the open doors.

A yelp rose up, already falling behind them. A howl followed, like oily black smoke on the air. Calvert twitched, shivering. The other two hounds turned at the sound, backed a synchronous step, swung around, and leaped out of the boxcar into the air. They jumped over the man, who lay in the open door, head down and arms splayed out, one hand hanging out of the car and flopping with the rhythm of the freight.

Still clutching the blackjack, Calvert leaned out the door and looked back. Wind pushed hair over his forehead and cooled the back of his neck. The hounds ran close beside the train, black, dun, and brown. For the length of two long hills he saw them, keeping up like no hounds should have.

At last they fell behind.

Calvert sagged down against the slatted siding, just inside the door. He leaned his head back, closed his eyes for a moment, then cast a sidewise look at his companion.

Man just lay there, bleeding. After a bit, he slid himself away from the door, rolled over, and slowly pulled himself up to sit against the siding.

He clutched at the place where the pocket had been, clutched raw, torn flesh instead and hissed, jerking his hand away. He leaned back, eyes narrowed against the light. He was younger than Calvert but older than punk, lines of his face pulled taught around pain. Something about the man was queer—something beyond falling out of nowhere; Calvert couldn't finger quite what it was.

"I'd say I was alkeed up, except I know I haven't tasted a sip of rare in years." He pulled a leg up, set the blackjack next to him, keeping his hand on it.

By the flick of the man's eyes, he didn't miss the blackjack, but he just looked in Calvert's face and moved his lips around words; then his head fell back against the slatted wood. The man's head swung with the jolting of the freight. He'd passed out.

He watched the man's head loll for a time, then edged over next to him to look more closely at his wounds. Holes ripped in the dark fabric of pants, enough to show the wounds underneath, what looked like burned skin around deep, purplish-red punctures and bloody, torn flesh. One of the pockets was torn clean away, with a hunk of flesh beneath. The skin was blistered and burned around the teeth punctures. Blood leaked oozily, still, out of the one in his left thigh. Deep.

His clothes were spattered with scorch marks. Around the skin of his right hand and wrist the burning looked bad.

Calvert sat back, rubbing a hand across his mouth, tasting the smell of sweat, blood, the metal tang of fear.

The red ball shot along the track into dusk, until Calvert could see the headlight gleam of the engine around a cut and down into a gorge. He reckoned by the bend of the land that they'd be coming up on Cheyenne soon. The freight would slow through the station, but not stop.

Man was still out, from what he could see in the westering light. He'd slept some himself, with the blackjack in his lap, one hand on it like it was his own hard-on and he was having himself off. He'd woken at a change in the air's flavor, cooler, the light growing long. He put the blackjack back in his sack and gathered himself up.

"Where are you going?" A low-pitched voice, rough with hurt, no accent Calvert could place.

"Hitting the grit. You oughta see about some help, see a pill-roller maybe."

The man's hand hovered over his missing pocket, then closed into a fist. "... hound," he mumbled, staring out the load doors at dusk-green land.

Calvert shouldered the sack and turned, standing in the opening and rocking with the slowing freight. The low voice came again, behind him.

"They'll have your scent now."

Calvert shifted his shoulders, shrugging the words away.

The train gave a long, harmonic whistle. Calvert leaned out and peered up the line, one hand to the rough edge of the loading door. A stiff night wind smelling of rain slapped across his face.

The freight slowed to a rolling chug, whistle calling. Calvert leaned further, sighting through the dusk for a soft spot in the buffalo grass. Then he swung down and out, stepping easy as could be into a running gait that took him into the scrubby growth along the tracks.

A thump in the grass behind him, a low cry of pain. Calvert turned to see the man tumble down the hill. He hunched there a bit, then climbed slowly to his feet, a silhouette in the dark.

"I don't need no company."

"They'll come for you ... when they're finished with me. But together, maybe, we—" the man put a hand to Calvert's arm. Calvert flung him off,

so hard he stumbled back, went to his knees. He climbed up again, head tilted, eyes questioning.

"You're on the fritz, Johnny. Opposite of help, you ask me, and I don't need no wounded tenderfoot latching onto me. Especially one as dropped out of nothing." He turned back around and started walking.

The man followed. Calvert could hear his breathing grow labored, hear him as he stumbled in the brush. But he managed to keep up. Damn if Calvert was going to run to lose him—nor had he made up his mind to shoulder a Responsibility. He kept it to a stiff mooch through the undergrowth.

"You helped me ... on the ... the train."

Calvert pressed his lips together, then said, "Helped myself, no choice."

The man followed him doggedly all the way to the edge of the grifter jungle sprawled just north of the Cheyenne station in the low wash by a creek.

Fires chipped bright jags from the dark among sagebrush and

HE CURSED AND SWUNG THE BLACK- JACK BACK DOWN ON THE HEAD OF THE BROWN DOG.

clumps of tall grasses. The orange-yellow light broke on the back of a spring creek, whose low glugging could be heard as they came among the little groups of men, some around the fires, some in shadowed spaces. The fires etched a face here and there out of the night. Bits of conversation drifted to Calvert as they passed.

"Hey, Angus, you take my spare socks?"

"... pearl diver at a beanery—"

"Chicago Jake was never no pearl diver."

"He was—first time he ever did deck and gunnels on a pullman out of Chi, he took to it natural."

Heads turned slightly, canted glances, as Calvert and his tagalong came through their midst.

"Who's that?" "Looks like Raney." "Who's the other?" "Never seen him." "Tenderfoot, maybe."

Calvert kept his head down, giving a nod where he got one, and found a spot by the creek, among the few gnarled trees rooted in the sandy soil.

He hunkered down, fished through the sack for his tin cup, scooped up some creek water, drank it off. The cold water washed down his throat. He scooped up a second and drank it, water tracking cool through the sweat-glued dust on his face and neck.

The man stood beside him, swaying slightly. After a bit he sort of fell to a seated position, like his strings had snapped.

Calvert sucked at his lower teeth for a minute, scooped up another cup of water, dumped that over his face and head, scooped up a fourth and handed it to the man. Man took it, kept his hands from shaking enough to drink it. Calvert untied the cloth from around his neck and dipped it in the creek, soaked and squeezed and scrubbed it over his face, then soaked and squeezed it some more and spread it on the tough grass. He was bone-sore weary and sure he was being had, somehow. But he rummaged in the sack, found what he had for trading and climbed to his feet.

"I'll be back in a piece. You watch my sack."

He traded news out of Chicago for some food and, after a wrangle, the last of his tobacco for a bottle of whitenine. He shook his head at questions and headed back to where he'd left the man.

Found him near passed out sitting up, one hand wrapped white knuckled on the sack, cup cradled in the other.

Calvert uncorked the whitenine and poured some into his damp neck cloth. The fumes rippled up through the air and stung his nose and eyes. Long time since he'd let himself get quite so close to that smell. He glanced over at his companion. "You have a name?"

Man smelled the corn whiskey, blinked at Calvert. He released his hold on the sack and straightened out a leg. "Kade," he said, soft.

"Calvert Raney. This is going to hurt some."

Toward the last third of the night, Calvert slept, head on his sack, curled around himself for warmth. His one thin blanket was on Kade. He woke at a sound and listened for it, tense as steel wire. Heard only the creek, the shifting of wind through the trees and grasses, the crack of an ember in a banked-up fire. Raw, whiskey-pale moonlight lay like phantom snow over everything. The low harmonic of a steam engine lulled across the wash. Calvert reckoned it to be the Portland Rose. He sighed out the breath he'd been holding and then it came, black and heavy as soot, a howling on the air, unmistakable, like no other howling he'd ever heard.

They hit Nampa in a dead funk at the end of a two-day run. Calvert led the way to a decaying barn, Kade stumbling along behind him. There they tucked up in a pile of old hay, scratchy, musty sweet, and warm. The smell reminded Calvert of his time as a harvest stiff.

Outside there'd been little enough light, a storm massing across the night sky. In the barn it was dark as camp coffee. Kade was feverish, Calvert could hear him tossing in his pile of hay. He caught himself straining for the sound of howling.

"Calvert?" Soft, fever-husked voice.

"Humm?"

"Ever seen a catfish out ... for ... a walk? They exist, you know, that can walk ... far away from here."

"That so?"

"... on their fins, they walk ... Calvert?"

"What?"

"... can't get ... back on the Cannonball without my whistle ..."

"Your what? Go to sleep, Kade, you're fevered."

"Hound got my whistle, swallowed it down like a fish taking a bluebottle."

"Kade—"

"... the bluebottles were buzzing in the wild rye ... the sun was so warm ... the Wabash'll go without me ..." He muttered a while more, no sense to it, then fell asleep, or passed out, head rolling in the hay.

Calvert stared through the darkness, shapes and twists of colored light floating before his open eyes. He closed his eyes and put his hand over them, feeling to be sure they were closed, which he'd been wont to do when he was eight and his brother whispered ghost stories in the dark.

The hay smell brought dreams of long fields, deep, dark soil, and whispering rows of wheat smoking through his mind. In the middle of the night, he woke to the sound of thunder and a howling of dogs. The howling was close.

The barn doors crashed open just as everything lit up outside, lightning veining the sky and silhouetting a woman in a bathrobe and work boots. She had a shotgun over one arm and a lantern at the end of the other. An old bloodhound bolted into the barn, stood square in front of Calvert and howled. Another blood stayed by the woman's legs.

"That's fine, Drinker," the woman said and the dog shut up. She held the lantern up and peered at Calvert and the oblivious Kade. She and Calvert regarded each other.

"Calvert? That you?"

"Yes ma'am." He added after a moment, in case she had doubts, "Gwen."

Gwendolyn Hale chewed the inside of her lip, eyes moving from Calvert, finally, to Kade, taking in particulars. Letting pass a number of things she might have said, she lifted her chin and asked, "How'd he come by the hurts?"

Calvert glanced at the bloodhound; brown eyes reflected lantern light, droopy face twitching as he tasted the air with his nose. "Wild dogs. I—didn't mean any harm. Coming here."

"Drinker and Shaw are severe on harm, as you might remember."

"I didn't know where else to go."

"No, I guess you wouldn't." She turned, then turned back. "Flop out here if you want, Calvert. But there's a bad storm coming in and this barn don't shed water like she used to."

"That's fine. Thank you."

Kade rolled in the hay and muttered a few unintelligible words. Calvert and the woman hovered on the edges of the silence that followed, looking at him.

"Hell," Gwen said. She looked out into the night as lightning whited out the sky again. She shook her head and snorted at some private thought. "Saint Armand, what a crock." Looked back at Calvert. "C'mon then, Calvert Raney, and bring your sick pup with you." She moved away, leaving the doorway empty. The bloods followed. Calvert rubbed a hand over his mouth, feeling, of a sudden, too tired to figure his next move.

"You coming?"

"Patron saint of hotel keepers." Gwen crouched in front of her oven with a box of matches. "I mean, I know it's just a rooming house, but you want to have a saint and it seems Armand is the best I can get."

In the kitchen, one floor lamp pooled yellow light insufficiently; the corners hid in shadow. Smoky burn marks of blown wiring stained the ceiling around the frosted glass of an overhead light. On a long table pushed up under the window, two glasses and a jug of

hard cider sat. Next to them were a cutting board, a pile of vegetable bits, and a casserole dish layered high.

Gwen had led Calvert, encumbered with Kade's limping weight, up to her house on the hill above the barn. Her lantern bobbed just ahead of them in the dark as the sky was sliced open by lightning. Thunder pitched along the ridge like giant marbles or stampeding mustangs.

They'd put Kade to bed in one of what Gwendolyn Hale called her guest rooms. "Only two fit for guesting, right now," she said. "All the rest got leaks and missing window panes. Hell, got a leak in my room." But she showed them into the room with a sweep of her arm, proud of the dark, polished wood floor and furniture, the blue chenille-covered twin beds. The bedside lamp was a dancing figure with a swagged shade.

She cleaned and dressed Kade's wounds proper; her eyelids puckered over the burns, but she ventured no comment. She made him drink some aspirin powders dissolved in water. As they were leaving him to rest, Gwendolyn reached to turn the lamp off. Kade muttered "... light ... please ... so dark here ...". So she left the light burning.

Now the rain tinned on the roof and splattered across the window glass above ruffled, white café curtains. In the corner by the stove, a large china bowl, a tin basin, and a bucket caught the arrhythmic dripping from a leak in the roof. Wind creaked and worried at the house, drafts eddying from the hall. The bloods, Drinker and Shaw, slept on the other side of the stove, red-brown bodies and big paws twitching in dream on a green oval of rag rug.

"I lit a candle for some guests, see. Guess I forgot to specify paying guests." She flicked a match across the box, held it, looking at the flame until it steadied, then turned on the gas. A solid, round-faced woman with brown hair loose about her shoulders, she had lined hands and a burr in her voice that Calvert had always placed as Maine-bred. The robe she wore hung in worn folds of purple and crimson Chinese silk, opulence at odds with her plainness.

Food in the oven, she sat. She ran a finger along the inside edge of her glass, licked the finger absently. Then she fixed brown eyes on Calvert's untouched glass.

"You're not drinking, Calvert?"

"No."

She nodded. "How long?"

"A while." Calvert shifted, feeling the sharpness of his bones against the wooden chair seat, the stillness and echoes and history in the house. He felt short of air, forced a breath and clenched his hands to stop them shaking. "Are you really thinking to turn the place into a hotel?" He gestured vaguely to the ceiling.

"Yeah." She leaned forward, chin in hand. Spread the fingers of her left hand in front of her face. A gold wedding band winked in the light. "Barton would have laughed himself halfway across the state at me." She picked up and rolled the glass between her palms, clinking it against the ring. Lightning splashed against the window glass. Rain shadows pocked her face and robe in the brief light. "I didn't think ever to see you again in this world, Calvert," she said.

Calvert looked down at his hands, clutched together in his lap, and tried to call up the memory of being at ease sitting at a table like this, in a home. The casserole began to smell good, a savory deep smell that made Calvert salivate. No better than a dog, he said to himself, and forced another breath.

Gwen uncorked the cider and poured a finger more. Smell of apple fire. "Barn's not what it was last time you flopped there. Whole place ..." She sipped, swirled the cider. "So, Calvert."

She cocked her head at him. She wasn't near so careless as she appeared. The shotgun leaned by the table on the other side of her from Calvert. "You never took on a tenderfoot before. You're turning down my cider. You look like Calvert Raney." She rubbed a finger over her lower lip. "Like a man who goes away sometime in the night. You going to be gone in the morning, Calvert? Going to leave him," she gestured toward the back of the house, "and deck the six-

ten out of here?"

Calvert didn't answer. A steam engine whistle called up from the tracks, through the rain.

Gwen looked down into her glass, tipping it to catch reflections. "I've been trying to decide whether to call my establishment Hale House or Ridge Hotel. Which do you favor?"

By Calvert's reckoning it was near four A.M. when he made his way down the dim, drafty hallway of Hale House into the warm light of the room where Kade slept.

He sat gingerly on the bed, ran his fingers over the blue chenille spread. A faint balm of starch and lavender reached him. Abruptly he stood. He poured water from the pitcher to the basin on the bureau, stripped off his clothes, unfolded one of the towels and laid it on the floor. With a block of yellow lye soap, he washed himself head to foot. He fingered his chin and thought about getting out his razor, then decided to leave it for the daylight.

Wearing the cleaner pants from his sack, he lay back with his arms crooked under his head, listening to the rain.

He looked over at Kade, examining him in the dim light. Short nap of brown-gold hair, light beard barely shadowing his cheeks. Compactly built and contained, even through the extremity of recent events. That, Calvert mused, accounted for him seeming older.

Kade's eyes opened, hazel blue, clearer than Calvert had yet seen them.

"Feeling better, then?"

Kade pushed himself up some, grimacing, then sighed. "Yes." He looked at Calvert, curiously as Calvert had been looking at him.

"I've been thinking about it," Calvert said. "You don't seem much like a ghost, you smell like sweat and fear and blood—you bleed. You're heavy when you pass out and your heart's beating in there, same as mine. If I'm crazy, well, then," Calvert shrugged, drawing his elbows in a bit, letting them fall back, "there I am."

Kade scratched his chin. "You're no crazier than most, I'd say. Less than some."

"Not reassuring, really, coming from you."

Kade laughed, then he scratched at his chin some more, a low, sandpapery sound of fingers over bristle. "You've been on the rails nearly, what, 10 years?"

Calvert looked at him sharply. "Near enough."

He glanced toward the window, around the room. "You've been here before, at this house?"

"I flopped in the barn for a while, long time past."

"Calvert, the thing about the hounds—" Kade met his eyes, sober as Sunday morning. "They won't stop; they'll keep coming."

"With all those freights we decked, and the rain, they'll have lost us by now."

"No. They're still coming."

Rain splattered, mixed with hail, across the window and roof. Calvert shivered, smelling the house scents of starch, lavender, wood polish. Feeling himself fed and warm, he thought about all the times he'd been out in weather like this, or worse. How he'd chosen it, over and over, until it wasn't a choice anymore.

"You're just fevered, kid. And scared of your own nightmares. They're dogs—" he broke off his own sentence in the middle. Fact was, they didn't seem like dogs, not like the bloods in Gwendolyn's kitchen.

"You smell of the rails. They'll home in on that scent. You could stay here a while. I mean really stay. The scent would fade off you." Kade leaned his head back, eyes closed.

"Well, and so could you."

Eyes still closed, Kade smiled at Calvert's tone, that had gone calming, like, Calvert knew, parent to frightened kid, sane man to nutjob.

"Could I?" Kade's voice loosened; he slid back down in the bed.

"Huh," Calvert said, thoughtfully. "Huh." When he looked over

at Kade the man was curled there, eyes closed, asleep.

The rain slacked off as light crept across the sky. The lace-curtained window grayed, a calm, monkish illumination filling the room. Calvert lay on the bed, awake; he had been most of the night. As light etched the dancing figure of the lamp out of the dim, he blinked tiredly, figured he was done thinking, and went to sleep.

A smell woke him, a complex fragrance more miraculous than the Wabash Cannonball would have been, chugging down endless track out of blue and balmy myth. Sweller than cigarette trees and clean socks. Calvert's nose quivered. Sausage, eggs, coffee.

Kade's bed lay empty, remade, spread carefully smooth as if the man'd never been there. Overcast daylight made the room murky without the churchy feeling of the early hours. He shaved and put on his shirt, then stood at the window. A road wound to Nampa's gathering of houses and buildings some distance away. The land swept up from the town, toward foothills. He couldn't see the train tracks. He felt ready to be gone—and he felt like staying. The latter spooked him so bad he wanted to be gone now, without even a taste of the heaven scent that had woken him. He hung between motivations. For the first time in years, he didn't know which side to swing down on.

In the kitchen, Kade worked slowly at a plate of food with a fork and knife in his bandaged hands. The door stood open and cool, spring-sweet air brushed through. One of the bloodhounds stood in the door. He looked around at Calvert, lifted his head with a soft grunt, then faced back out. Down the hill, Calvert could see Gwen at the pump. A burgeoning garden lay behind her. The other blood stood with her, the shotgun leaning nearby.

Calvert helped himself to the rest of the eggs and bacon and poured some coffee.

Kade eyed Calvert's sack as he shrugged it off his shoulder to the floor and sat down. "Leaving?"

Calvert forked a big mouthful of eggs before answering. "Say those hounds are still coming, no reason to bring them down on her. You're doing OK; I figure we split up and go in different directions, it'll split the hounds, confuse them."

Kade shook his head.

"What?"

Kade leaned on his elbows, stared downward. "It might work," he said, and now he sounded like the parent reassuring a child. "Maybe—maybe they'll come after me first."

Calvert chewed. "They might split up."

"Calvert—you saw them on the train."

"Won't bring them down on her." He gestured.

"They won't go after her. If she offered them her throat, they wouldn't."

Calvert rubbed a hand over his eyes. "Sure. And why is that?"

"She doesn't exist for them. She's less than a ghost. Even to me..."

He mopped up eggs with a heel of bread and chewed thoughtfully. "Even to me, she's like a kind of memory, solid, but light-filled; like an angel, maybe, or a figment come to life."

"Food seems real enough to you."

Kade grinned, wolfish.

Calvert grunted and tucked the whole exchange away with the rest of the ravings. "I'm going. Time to be out of here and shot of you."

"Calvert, if you stayed here, helped out for a while ... they might pass you by. It'd change your scent."

Calvert sipped coffee. "Well, I am going to see what chores I can do here. Then I'll be on my way. Not much you can do with them hands, so you better not worry about it. Rest some more."

Kade looked at his hands. "No. I'll go now." He shook himself slightly, then stood. He looked at Calvert, smiled with his whole face, a look out of somewhere else. "Thank you for the help, Calvert."

Calvert watched him as he walked off down the hill, stopped to speak to Gwendolyn, walked on.

Gwendolyn found things for Calvert to do. He fixed a broken step at the front, weeded in the garden, the near-mint spice of tall basil plants in his nose, cleaned out the chicken coop. There was plenty to do.

In the beginnings of gray evening, he helped her load her truck with crates of early produce and hay-padded baskets of eggs.

"Hal Pearson prefers to do his buying after business hours," she said, gossiping about her neighbors. "Man stays up all night doing stock and sleeps in the morning, leaving the sales to his wife." She squinted at the sky.

Another storm was piling darkly on the northeast horizon, moving in over the valley. Calvert stood back and wiped sweat from his face with his neck cloth. Gwendolyn opened the Ford's beat-up green door; it gave a wheezing groan. She wore a man's denim shirt and work pants and had stuck her old work gloves into the waist.

"Drinker, Shaw!" she called. The bloods leapt up into the cab with a whine and a mutter. She climbed in after them, slammed the door, and looked at Calvert.

"Well, Calvert." She pursed her lips, squinting toward the weather again.

"You'd be welcome to stay another night. I can use the help." This last seemed hard for her to admit, but then she laughed. "Maybe you could tell." Then she shook her head. "But you won't." She shoved the Ford into gear and the truck rumbled and bounced down the dirt drive.

Cool, slowly darkening air dried the sweat on Calvert's face and neck. He twisted the cloth, retied it and stood there, thinking, though it seemed to him he'd done enough thinking lately to grow a second head. The first raindrops specked across his face coldly and thunder crackled in the distance. The air grew colder as he stood there; it blew stiffly, pawing at his clothes. An old weathervane creaked on top of Gwendolyn's house.

A familiar, belling howl pierced the air. Two others shadowed it.

Calvert shuddered at the awful harmony and took several deep lungfuls of the cold storm air. Then he climbed the hill to Gwendolyn Hale's house. Her shotgun leaned against a wall in the kitchen. He hefted it and checked the chambers.

The scent of gunpowder came sharp in his nose. The cold metal and hard, smooth wood in his hands settled a weight of consequence ghostly into his muscles. Long-lost motivations stood in his spine and flexed in his arms. Like shadows cast by thick lamp light, it felt both familiar and strange.

EVEN TO
ME, SHE'S
LIKE A
KIND OF
MEMORY,
SOLID, BUT
LIGHT-
FILLED; LIKE
AN
ANGEL...

Nampa train yard huddled under the weather, small and deserted, the gandy tucked up out of it in his line shack. The rain had arrived, bitchy with wind. Calvert took shelter in the lee of a tin and branch lean-to, hobo-built. Hunched down in the driest spot he could find, he listened to the rain drumming the earth, watched lightning fire distant clouds, breathed the rain's wet, the rank green of the weeds, and the steel tang of the tracks.

He cradled the shotgun in his lap.

Calvert didn't hear Kade, didn't know he was there until he'd ducked under the shelter. He'd expected him, though. Man would go to the track whence he came, where else? Kade hunkered down beside him, looking out at the rain. He blew on his bandaged hands, tucked them up into his jacket, wrapping his arms around himself.

Howling planed through the wet evening, closer now, coming. Calvert wiped his mouth with a shaking hand, glanced at Kade.

Kade gestured to the shotgun. "You know how to use that?"

Calvert grunted. "Lawman ... once." He imagined somewhere, away in a graveyard in Pennsylvania, the dead he thought of as his own turning in their graves, watching him.

Calvert felt his heart shudder, like missing a step. Was it the hellhounds, getting closer? Or the familiarity of the shotgun in his hands, the shadowy weight that had settled into him when he took it up? No, earlier; it had crept up on him, hovering over his shoulder and whispering through him since ... since he traded his last tobacco for a bottle of whiteness to doctor a man who dropped out of nowhere.

He closed his eyes and leaned back. Put shaking fingers over his lids to feel them closed. Cold at the outside of his skin shivered down into him. He took a breath, and another. They hurt in his lungs.

"Calvert?" Hands touched him.

"Leave off," he coughed, voice thin, and waved a hand. Kade dropped his hands, crouched beside him. Calvert stared at the sky. Lightning roiled in a distant cloud, a faraway lamp briefly lit. He coughed again, found himself laughing.

Kade tilted his head back, watching him. The laughter faded. Calvert wiped his mouth. He thought of his ghosts, looked at them across time. They were no longer accusing, no longer hungry for his life. They were just dead.

"Go back to the house, Calvert."

Calvert stretched a hand out from under the shelter, caught some rain and put wet fingers over his eyes. "House is a figment. Hounds are a figment—all of it—like cigarette trees and the Wabash Cannonball arrowing out of heaven. You, too."

Kade looked at Calvert like a fox looking up from a pile of feathers. "Am I?"

"No."

They sat listening to the rain hiss on the shelter's tin roof.

Howling rang out, close by, long air-shredding chorus. Kade looked out, back at Calvert. He scrambled to his feet and stood in

the entrance of the lean-to.

The dogs came, snarling and smoking through the rain, graceful demons, hellfire hallucinations, giving off a phosphor glow that steamed through the rain and darkness. Calvert shivered, watching, hypnotized. They stopped, light steaming into the air around them.

Tall hounds, so dense with muscle they seemed to bend the air where they touched it. Hard and sheened like oil. Their eyes gleamed, flickering. Smoke blue as a steel rail curled up from their bodies in freshets and wisps. Saliva dripped from sharp teeth and snarling mouths. Where it hit the dirt, steam hissed up into the cold rain.

Their growling fetched through Calvert's blood. The glow in their eyes burned out at him like glims to a cigarette in the dark of a boxcar. He was hypnotized, his mind fear-stunned. His hands dropped from the gun, dragged on the rough, hard-packed soil.

The dogs closed in, dark shadows with burning eyes. Then the dun dog melted through the air, a movement Calvert couldn't track, past Kade and suddenly beside him. Calvert stared into glowing, whirling eyes.

He felt a terrible spinning, an utter despair that billowed up, like heavy air, from within him. It was within him ... it was him ... he was nothing, alone, nowhere.

He turned his head from it, closed his eyes. But he couldn't close his eyes against the substance, the dark, utter hopelessness spinning heavily up from within him. Calvert heard his own voice give a wracked, painful mewl.

His heart pumped hard as hail on a steel rail. He canted his head as far back as the lean-to allowed. The dog snarled, lips pulled back from teeth, leaning in close to Calvert's face. It smelled of metal, coal, kerosene.

Vertigo. The hound's breath came hot as steam and smelled like it: hot engine steam. Sweat prickled on Calvert's skin. Saliva dripped from the dog's mouth, splashed on Calvert's arm, scalding.

He felt the weight of the shotgun across his thighs. His hands rose, spasmed, and locked. He thrust the muzzle in the hound's snout. The hound pushed past it for his shoulder, closed teeth in flesh. Sickening

pain went down into his arm, flared like fire over his heart. He surged back against the lean-to, the whole thing shaking. The hound dragged him back forward, heavy, wiry body inexorable.

Burning pain overtook him; his trigger hand began to go slack, to let go and slide away. A sudden crack of thunder shocked his mind wide; in the flash of lightning that followed closely on the thunder, he saw, not the tracks and scrubby land of Nampa, but a long, endless gleam of tracks into tunneled blue distance.

It was beautiful, a fabled road into grifter myth.

Calvert shut his eyes. With a gasp, he made his hand take the trigger and lift the shotgun again. In a spasm of pain, he squeezed cold metal.

The explosion flash blinded and deafened him, throwing heat and light in his face. A brief moment of darkness followed as the recoil slammed him back into the lean-to. Then the darkness lifted.

SALIVA DRIPPED FROM SHARP TEETH AND SNARLING MOUTHS. WHERE IT HIT THE DIRT, STEAM HISSED UP...

He heaved a breath of cold air. His shoulder throbbed.

He heard a screeching sound, like the grate of a brake on the rails. It came from the dun hound beside him. The hound stood there, with his blood dripping from its teeth, staining pale fur, a double fist-sized hole in its body, just behind the front legs. Its glowing eyes whirled. A thin whine went up from it, escalating into a shriek.

The hound panted, head flung up, neck stretched with a howl that was lost in the shrieking. Calvert blinked. The shrieking didn't issue from the dog's throat. It came from the shotgun-blasted hole in its body. It rose and rose. He'd seen a train derail and crash once, car into car, into itself.

It was like that.

Smoke went up from the dog into the thin rain. The glow went from its eyes and its body caved in on itself in the center. It knelt, then fell to its side, smoke wisping and curling up from it.

Calvert looked past it to see Kade standing against one of the shelter poles, a heavy stick in his hands, canted between the brown and black. Even as Calvert looked, Kade went down under the brown as the black took the stick from his hands.

Calvert came to one knee, then to his feet. Staggering, he came out from under the shelter. Rain slicked his face and hands coldly.

Kade rolled with the brown nearly under his feet, the hound's growling and Kade's grunts the only sound but the rain. Calvert aimed at the black as it joined the brown.

The shot threw the hound back from Kade, caving in its head. Its legs struggled for purchase a moment, then the same screeching sound went up from it as from the dun.

The brown let loose of Kade and raised its muzzle, dripping blood and gore. It stared at the black, then turned to Calvert. Hell-fire eyes whirled. It put back its head and howled, a long, mournful sound, so like to a train whistle Calvert shuddered, and knew he'd never hear such a sound again without hearing this moment in it.

The fire in the eyes died away. The howling slowly faded to rain-steeped silence.

Kade struggled to half-sit. He let go the ruff of the brown. It didn't move. It stood there, frozen.

Calvert knelt by the dun. What he saw in the caved-in wreckage of the dog's body was metal, pistons, and gears, broken and twisted, bits of smoking coal and ash, and something that looked like honeycombed porcelain. Slick with oil. He could smell the oil, a bitter tang on the air.

Kade put his hands over his eyes for a while. Then, after a bit, he shifted out from under the brown with a grunt. His breath steamed in the chill wet air. He came over and fell to his knees by the dun. Plunging a hand into the broken metal and porcelain body, he felt around. Steam rose up. Calvert listened to the sloshy sounds, watched viscous oil ooze out, staining the bandages on Kade's wrist. With a sucking squish, he pulled his hand out, covered in goopy oil and bits of other matter Calvert couldn't identify, his fingers fisted around something.

THE HOUND STOOD THERE, WITH HIS BLOOD DRIPPING FROM ITS TEETH...

He uncurled them to reveal a silver whistle; the metal was patterned finer than lace. Inside it Calvert could see movement, burning color speaking in minute figures, bewildering, vivid and deep ... Calvert jerked his head back and squeezed his eyes shut. When he opened them Kade had closed his fingers around the thing.

"Calvert," Kade said, then shook his head and grinned. The rain trailed through the blood on his face; he looked like a ghoul. He touched Calvert's face with his empty hand. Calvert felt the scratch of bandages, the warmth of fingers.

"Thank you."

Kade stood straight. He tossed the whistle into the air and caught it, then winced. But he seemed uncommonly pleased for a man so hurt. He turned and started to walk away. Calvert stared after him, then shook his head.

"Where are you going?"

"Train coming," Kade said over his shoulder.

"I don't hear it."

"Give it a minute."

Calvert listened to the rain, peered up the track into the dark. He looked back at Kade. "So you're taking to the life?"

Kade gave him a lifted brow. "Did I ever say I was tenderfoot, Calvert?"

He heard it then, through the multiple voices of the rain dripping on the tin, trickling in rivulets along the oversoaked ground, hissing into the land far and near, he became aware of the sweet call of a train whistle. A freight line, slowing for its pass through station. After a while, he could hear its rhythm. Soon the locomotive's head lamp cut through the dark, its beam stitched by a thousand needles threaded with rain as it poured across track, grass, platform.

Kade turned away and fell into an easy lope toward the slowing train. He limped only slightly.

Calvert started after him. The rain stung his face with tiny cold touches. His boots squelched in the mud, water seeping into the right one. The train slowed. He could see the gunnel, at this speed an easy deck. He started into the long-legged lope that would bring him to it, and away.

Within a few feet, he slowed, stopped. He hefted the shotgun. Gwen's shotgun. He held it close to his body and watched Kade make the running leap and swing up into a boxcar. He raised one hand to Calvert and put the whistle to his mouth.

The air wavered, like the hot shimmer over a red ball freight arrowing through an August heat. Kade was gone, the boxcar empty. Calvert blinked and looked around him. The lifeless hounds were gone, too. There was only the slapping rain, the dark night.

Calvert rubbed a hand over his mouth. His shoulder throbbed sickly, and his elbow dully.

The freight chunked past him, filling his vision. Coal cars, soda ash, potatoes, livestock. Then it was past and the world opened up again on the other side, all around. The train put on speed for the climb out of the valley. Some moments later it was gone around the station curve. Wiping the rain from his eyes, he crossed the tracks and started up the ridge to Hale House. ♣

IT'S FAIRLY EASY TO SLAY THE DRAGONS

YOU SEE. IT'S A BIT TOUGHER TO FACE

DOWN THOSE THAT YOU DON'T.

THE DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

"Will no one ever come rescue me?" lamented the Fair Princess. Her delicate fingers clung to the bars of her cell as she stared out at the huge Dragon snoring in front of her. When she rattled the rusted iron chains that bound her, the lazy Dragon opened one eye. He shook his single golden horn from side to side as if to say "no." As the Fair Princess sighed, her loyal Maid tiptoed up to her cell with the evening's ration of bread and water.

The Fair Princess's call for help had gone out from her prison to knights errant all over the land. But not a single one had been able to rescue her from the Dragon's dark tower at the top of a rocky hill.

Just the week before, a couple more attempts had met with failure. One knight, Iulgus, had stormed up the hill on his mighty steed ready for combat. He had already saved several dozen damsels in distress and had dispatched dragons by the score. His body bore the scars of countless battles.

As he charged with his lance in the air, Iulgus was surprised when his fearsome Dragon didn't fly out into the open to do battle. Dragons usually did. The dark tower was much too quiet. When he reached the tower gate, he dismounted in a flash and drew his sword. Still, he could not hear a single sound.

Iulgus checked the gate. It swung open with ease. Prepared for a trap, he made his way with caution up the well-lit spiral staircase. He was stopped by a heavy wooden door at the top of the stairs.

Convinced he had reached the Dragon's lair, Iulgus slammed the door with all his might. To his surprise, Iulgus found himself sailing through the air. He sprawled across the stone floor with a crash. The door had been unlocked. Just like the gate. He jumped to his feet, his sword held up for battle.

But when he looked around, Iulgus saw only the Fair Princess. She sat on her bed, brushing her thick red hair while reading an old book. She looked bewitched and bewitching.

BY E.A. JOHNSON

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN MONTELEONE





SURELY HER KIND RESCUER, WONDERFUL HE WAS, WOULD BE

Julgus looked all over her huge room, but saw no Dragon, no cell, not even a single chain. Confused, he walked up to the most beautiful princess he had ever seen.

The handsome Julgus cleared his throat. "Fair Princess," he said "I've come to rescue you."

The Fair Princess looked up from her copy of Heraclitus's *Fragments* with a puzzled frown. She pointed to an empty spot on the Turkish carpet.

"But what about the Dragon?" she whispered, so low that the brave knight almost couldn't hear. "He will kill us when he awakes. And how do you plan to get me out of my cell? The bars are much too strong to bend."

Julgus cleared his throat a second time. "But Fair Princess," he said in a whisper, falling under the spell of her almond eyes. "We can just walk out. Both the door and the gate are open. Having been in the lair of many dragons, I can tell by the smell of this place there's never been a dragon here at all. You're free to leave this tower whenever you want. Won't you please come with me?"

The Fair Princess began to cry. "Go away," she said. "You're just another one of those bad dreams that the Dragon keeps sending me. Tormenting me with the promise of freedom. Trying to convince me that he doesn't exist. And the fact that you're more handsome than most men in my dreams just makes everything so much worse. Go away. Leave me alone. And don't bother me any more." She continued sobbing, wiping her tears on the soft green velvet of her dress.

Julgus was stunned. He had no idea what to do. None of his previous battles had prepared him for an encounter like this.

The Fair Princess's Maid came in and led Julgus back down the spiral staircase. She shut the door and gate behind them. Feeling sorry for the brave Julgus, the kind Maid said, "For the Princess, the Dragon is real."

Not used to failure, the dejected Julgus mounted his steed and rode away.

The next knight to attempt a rescue was Tugevus. Stronger than Julgus but not as experienced, Tugevus was more prone to action and always ready for violence. He found it too much trouble to stop and think.

And so, yelling his favorite battle cry, Tugevus charged up the hill, up the stairs, and into the room. So intent on battle was he that he never even noticed the complete lack of resistance. Like Julgus, he found the Fair Princess sitting on her bed, brushing her thick red hair while reading an old book. She looked enchanted and enchanting.

"Where's the Dragon?" Tugevus shouted. He spun around the room, sword in the air, fire in his eye.

The Fair Princess pointed to an empty spot on the Turkish carpet after marking her place in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Tugevus looked. "Where?" he asked, still ready for combat.

The Fair Princess pointed to the same place once again, this time without bothering to look up from her book.

"How can I fight what I cannot see? How can I kill something that doesn't exist?" roared an angry Tugevus.

He sheathed his sword and strolled over to the Fair Princess's bed. Grabbing her hand, Tugevus said, "Come with me. Let's get out of here. Consider yourself rescued."

But as he pulled her off the bed, the Fair Princess began screaming with such energy that her piercing shrieks hurt his ears. Although Tugevus was a crude knight, he would never want to cause additional distress to a damsel—especially not to one as beautiful as the Fair Princess. So he let her go.

Tugevus shrugged his shoulders and then marched back down the stairs. The Maid appeared from nowhere to close the door and gate behind him. Since Tugevus had been so rude to the Fair Princess, the Maid didn't say a single word to him. And so, an angry Tugevus stormed away on his steed.

Unknownst to Julgus, Tugevus, and several dragon slayers before them, a young apprentice knight named Vaikivus had observed their misadventures. Perched in a nearby oak tree, he watched everything as it happened through his spyglass.

Now Vaikivus was a poor excuse for a knight. The sight of blood made him ill. When Vaikivus went hunting with his father the Count, he made sure all his arrows missed their targets. After all, he still felt guilty about the carp he had once caught by accident when fishing for one of his lost boots in the castle moat. Vaikivus preferred to spend his time reading in the comfort of his favorite bed.

But when Vaikivus had first spotted the Fair Princess through his spyglass, he had fallen in love with her and the way her lips moved when she read. Their libraries had all the same books. And so Vaikivus was determined to rescue her from her imaginary Dragon. In any event, his father had sent him away and told him not to come home until he became a real knight. According to the rules of that age, this meant either saving a damsel in distress or killing a dragon. Or both, if at all possible.

Vaikivus slid down from his oak tree, picking up several splinters along the way. He was almost on the road to town before he had pulled the last one free. Spotting the Fair Princess's Maid dragging some laundry down to the river for a wash, Vaikivus offered to help. The Maid accepted with pleasure.

During the days that followed, Vaikivus befriended the Maid, carrying all her loads to and from the nearby town. Over several glasses of mead at the local tavern, Vaikivus charmed the Maid into describing the Dragon, the cell, and the chains as the Fair Princess saw them. "The Dragon is powerful strong with a single golden horn," she said. "He sleeps most of the time, snoring so loud that the Fair Princess often can't hear herself read."

Once he had learned all he needed to know, Vaikivus gave the town goldsmith half the gold he had brought with him. He instructed the smith to melt it down and cast it in the shape of a large horn. Next, Vaikivus visited the local apothecary to buy a small bag of baking powder. And at a jewelry shop, he bought a tiny file inlaid with diamonds.

As he waited for the goldsmith to finish his work, Vaikivus took out the beautiful silver key that opened the door to his library back home. He polished it until it shone. At last, everything was ready for his story to unfold.

Taking out a small piece of paper, some black ink, and a quill, Vaikivus wrote:

"Fair Princess—I have spied you from afar and have fallen in

NO MATTER HOW BURIED TO ASH.

love with you. But being only an apprentice knight, I fear the dreadful Dragon that protects you. But do not despair, Fair Princess, I will rescue you when I figure out how." He signed the note "Vaikivus" with a flourish. And then he added a P.S. "After you read this note, please eat it so that the Dragon won't find it."

Having done this, he gave the note to the Maid for her to smuggle into the Fair Princess, hidden inside her loaf of bread.

When the Fair Princess read the note from Vaikivus, her heart leapt with joy. At long last, a real knight had come to save her! She chewed and swallowed the paper, mixing it with her evening meal of bread and water to hide its unpleasant taste. Vaikivus's words were like seeds of hope. Once planted within her they made her glow. But then she began to worry that some harm might befall the brave young knight.

The following day, hidden inside her small loaf of bread, she found another note and a small diamond-encrusted file. This note read:

"Fair Princess—Here is a file whose diamonds are so strong they can slice through any chains—even yours. Hide the file under your pillow during the day so that the Dragon doesn't see it. If he should spot it, tell him that it's a piece of jewelry. You can saw away at your chains when the Dragon is sound asleep. Signed, Vaikivus. P.S. Eat this note too. I've dipped it in peppermint to make it more palatable."

That night by the moonlight, the Fair Princess filed away at her chains, a smile radiating from her face. She continued smiling even though the paper was tough and she hated the taste of peppermint.

The next day her serving Maid smuggled in another note along with a beautiful silver key. The message on the paper read:

"Fair Princess—With the help of your trusted Maid, I broke into the tower and stole away the key to your cell. Here is a copy. The original is already back in its place so the Dragon will never notice it was missing. Make sure you hide it. During the next full Moon at midnight, I will rescue you. But don't do anything until you hear an owl hoot three times. Signed, Vaikivus. P.S. Please eat this. I've soaked it in almond paste. I apologize for the peppermint."

The process repeated itself the next night as well. But this time the serving Maid slipped her a little bag of white powder along with a note. She read:

"Fair Princess—This bag contains a magic powder that I got from an old hag. Blow it over the sleeping Dragon's head. It will sleep long enough for you to sneak away. But make sure that you don't breathe any of it yourself or you may fall asleep as well. By the way, tomorrow night the Moon will be full. Get ready. Signed, Vaikivus. P.S. This note is laced with hazelnut liqueur so it should be easy to swallow."

That night, the Fair Princess sawed through the rest of her chains. She waited the entire next day in anticipation. With her evening's ration of bread and water, she got a final note. It read:

"Fair Princess—Tonight is the night. Be prepared. My trusted steed and I will be waiting for you at the tower gate. After I send you into the safety of the forest, I will return to do battle with the Dragon. Wish me luck. Be sure to have the key and powder ready. Signed, Vaikivus. P.S. This note you need not eat. If the Dragon finds it, it will be too late!" The Fair Princess's heart beat faster than it ever had beaten before.

Around midnight, just as Vaikivus had promised, the Fair Princess heard an owl hoot three times. With ever so much care, she got out of bed and unlocked the door to her cell with the key that Vaikivus had given her. The Dragon didn't hear a thing.

Tiptoeing across the Turkish carpet toward the snoring Dragon, the Fair Princess held her breath as she clutched her favorite books to her breast. With her free hand, she sprinkled the powder over the Dragon's head. His right eye opened and she jumped, dropping a book. But before the Dragon could shake his golden horn "no," he fell back to sleep, snoring louder than before. At long last, she was free. She tiptoed down the stairs.

By the gate at the bottom of the tower, the young apprentice knight was waiting for her with his tired old horse. He helped the Fair Princess mount his nag and then slapped it on the rump to send it trotting down the hill.

As she looked back at her rescuer, the Fair Princess saw the young knight unsheathe his sword in the moonlight and take a deep breath before charging up the stairs. Surely her kind rescuer, no matter how wonderful he was, would be burned to ash.

When Vaikivus reached the empty room at the top of the stairs, he began shouting and swinging his sword as if doing battle with a Dragon. He slammed his blade against the stone wall to make sparks fly.

Before long he was so tired of swinging his heavy sword that he cut himself twice by mistake and began bleeding all over. Some of the sparks landed on the Fair Princess's bed and it caught fire. Soon, the whole tower was ablaze. The thick smoke made him cough and the fire singed his hair.

Releasing a final triumphant yell, Vaikivus grabbed as many books as he could and ran down the stairs to escape the flames. In his exhaustion, he tripped and fell tumbling to the bottom of the spiral staircase, making an enormous racket. In the process, he dented his brand new armor and bruised himself all over.

From the safety of the forest, the Fair Princess listened to the fearsome battle. In horror, she watched the sparks fly. She was certain the Dragon would defeat her valiant but inexperienced rescuer. When the fire began, she started sobbing.

After the Fair Princess had almost given up hope, Vaikivus emerged from the tower holding a golden horn up in the air. "I have killed your Dragon!" he shouted. The Fair Princess almost fell off the horse with joy.

Vaikivus stumbled down the hill to the waiting Princess. When he arrived, barely able to stand, the Princess let out a little cry. Vaikivus was burned, bruised, and covered with blood. His new armor was a complete mess. The Fair Princess, her skin smelling of rosewater, kissed him on the cheek and said, "Thank you for rescuing me."

"It was nothing really. Nothing at all," Vaikivus said, giving her the bloody golden horn. Then he fainted.

During the weeks that followed, the Fair Princess nursed him back to health, falling completely in love with him in the process. To help with his healing, she read him book after book.

When at long last he was well, Vaikivus rode with the Fair Princess and her Maid back to his father's castle. To anyone and everyone who would listen, the Fair Princess repeated the story of how the brave young Vaikivus had rescued her from the Dragon. She so believed her words to be true that she made others believe them as well. Vaikivus said little about his brave deed.

WITH A LONG SIGH, VAIKIVUS CLOSED THE PAGES OF HIS favorite tale. He could still see the Fair Princess glowing in his mind's eye. For him, the Fair Princess was real. As he fell asleep in the comfort of his favorite bed, he whispered to the empty air around him: "It was nothing really. Nothing at all." 🍷

They say that life is what you make it—perhaps the same is true of death.

CHENTING, in THE Land of THE DEAD

BY KIJ JOHNSON

ILLUSTRATION BY

PATRICK ARRASMITH

In the end, the only job that presented itself was the governorship of a remote province in the land of the dead. Chenting was the name of the place, and the scholar and his concubine Ah Lien talked of it often as they lay entangled in their sweaty robes after lovemaking.

It would be a place of fields, he said. The peasants will farm rice and raise oxen. The air will smell a bit like the smoke from the fake money that is burned to give one influence among the dead; but it will also be rich with perfumes, the scents that only dogs and pigs can smell in this world.

No, she said. It will be like distant Tieling, where the fields lead up to the mountains, except that the mountains will never stop but will go up and up; and snow will blow like dust across the fields, and the sky will be the purple-black of a thundercloud's heart or a marten's wing. And it will be lonely, she said, and held him tighter, pressing her face against his neck.



Are there NO OTHER CANDIDATES for this position, that you're LOOKING FOR a living man TO FILL IT?

He was dying; they both knew that. The man with the eyes of smoke, the man who had come to tell him of the post at Chenting, had said so.

"But I'm waiting to hear how I did at the examinations!" the scholar had said to him. "I was hoping for a position, ah, somewhere."

The man bowed again, as he had at the start of the conversation: as before, the bow seemed both perfunctory and punctilious. "And well you might hope. Hope is the refuge of the desperate. But let me be candid here. You're poor and can't afford the bribes or fees for anything better than, let us say, a goatherdship. And this governorship in Chenting, in the land of the dead, is available immediately."

The scholar stroked his chin. "But I'm not dead."

"You will be soon enough," the man said. "It is as certain as, well, taxes."

The scholar frowned. "Are there no other candidates for this position, that you're looking for a living man to fill it?"

"As I have said, you will not live for much longer, making this point moot."

"Are there other dead candidates? Or soon to be dead," the scholar added.

"Well, yes, there are always candidates. But I expect you could get

it." The man with eyes of smoke made a gesture like two coins clinking together.

"But—" the scholar began and stopped. "I must consult."

The man bowed yet again and left.

"Well?" the scholar said to the empty room. There was a soft brushing of fabric and Ah Lien glided from behind the patched screen with the painted camellias. She was better than he deserved, the lovely Ah Lien, with eyes as narrow and long and green as willow leaves—better than he could afford; but her birth was common and the eyes were considered an eccentricity for a woman in her position.

"You heard." He said. A statement, not a question. Of course she had heard: She was one ear, he was the other.

"Chenting," she whispered. "In the land of the dead. When must you leave, my lord?"

AND THAT WAS THAT. THERE WAS NO CHOICE ABOUT HIS dying, only about his position in the scheme of things after his death, and both knew it was better to be a dead governor than a dead scholar.

But he lingered for a time with her, and they talked often of Chenting.



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The governor's palace, he said, will be built of white stone and then plastered over, so even where the plaster has cracked the walls glow like bleached silk. And the roof is covered with ceramic tiles the color of daylilies. The gardens are countless enclosed roofless areas, each filled with hanging baskets containing small pines whose needles chime when one passes.

No, she said, the gardens are cold and abandoned. Winds blow through the empty rooms, and sometimes one sits by an unglazed window, watching the patterns made by dead leaves blown in the air.

It can't be like that, he said. It must be as I see it.

If it is, she whispered, summon me to your side and I will go.

THEY HAD ALREADY DECIDED SHE COULDN'T ACCOMPANY him. The man with eyes like smoke had said nothing of her, and Ah Lien was understandably reluctant to die. She loved the scholar dearly, but she had aging parents to consider, and an ancestral shrine to tend. Still, she was willing.

HIS DEATH WHEN IT CAME WAS A COMPARATIVELY simple one. He coughed a bit as the winter began to take hold. Ah Lien held him close and warmed him when chills shook him. Then they talked of Chenting.

The bedrooms of the governor's palace, he said, and he paused to catch his breath. The bedrooms have braziers of porcelain shaped like horses, and each horse bears a silver saddle on its back, and each saddle holds a fire of charcoal. The smoke that curls up smells of sandalwood and jasmine. And the bed is soft, covered with silk, with pillows carved of black wood. And the pillow book there has positions we have never imagined!

No, she said, the beds at Chenting are cold and narrow and hard, made of wheat husks in hemp bags. The smoke smells of funeral biers, but the fires are cold and colored the blue of foxfire in the marshes at night. "Do not leave me, my love," she said.

"I will send for you," he promised, and died.

WHEN HE AWAKENED IN CHENTING HE WAS AMAZED AT first at how well he felt. There was no pain, no trouble breathing, no aches from holding a brush too tightly or walking in new shoes. And Chenting was everything he had imagined and more. The fields were lusher than he had expected, and seemed to be near harvest. The air smelled as rich as he had dreamed. And he had much money to spend, for Ah Lien had sold her hair ornaments to buy paper money, and burned it so that it would follow him.

He missed her and wanted her beside him, and since Chenting was warm and beautiful and not like the cold visions she had predicted, he sent a message to her. "Come," it read. "I have seen Chenting and it is as fair as I envisioned. The birds are the colors of flames, and their songs are sharp as the crackling of fire. Come be beside me." He sent a messenger off with an entourage, to show her the honor she deserved.

The messenger returned. "She is coming," he said.

Many days later, the entourage at last arrived, brilliant with tassels, loud with flutes. The governor of Chenting straightened his cap and calmed his heart, and descended the red stairs leading to the courtyard where his entourage milled around the sedan chair he had sent for her. He brushed aside the chair's gold-thread curtain. "Ah Lien—" he began.

For an instant he heard Ah Lien sobbing, and then that was gone. The sedan chair was empty and silent.

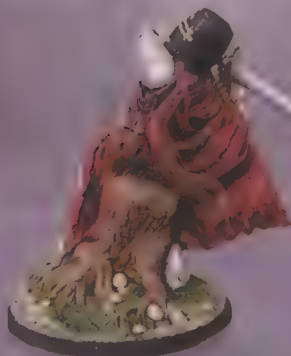
The governor of Chenting stormed and raged and ordered great punishments for the entourage, who had failed to keep her safe. But even as he wept and cursed, he knew what had happened.

He had found Chenting just as he had expected, a place where an old man's pains were eased. But she had imagined another Chenting, a place where youth is irrelevant and even beauty is lonely. He didn't know the Chenting she had gone to, but he knew it was not his.

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sally harpe

Illustration by J.K. POT

They say
that what
goes around
comes
around,
and it
surely
does.
Around and
around
and around
'til you
drop.



THEY TELL THIS ONE

in those tobacco towns along the Green River.

One day Roy Barlowe and his dad walked up the hill to Townie Harpe's old place. Townie's widow, Miss Erskine, was sitting on a cane-bottom chair on the porch, fooling with some clothes.

Roy didn't know whether she was sewing or quilting or doing some kind of mending. He never paid much attention to that kind of work. Still, if the mother knew those ways then it followed that the daughter would.

He saw that his dad had removed his hat and Roy wanted to kick himself for forgetting to do that himself. They'd gone over it again one last time on the walk up from their place, just down the river, and here he was, already messing up.

Nothing for it but to start. "Afternoon, Miss Erskine," Roy said. It came out kind of fast.

The worn-down little woman peered out at them. "Are those Barlowes out there? And cleaned up? I guess I missed church this morning, because I didn't even know it was Sunday."

"Yes, ma'am. It's me, Roy Barlowe, here with my dad. He made me—we came up here so I could talk to you some." His dad had told him to act like everything was his idea, and he'd told him too not to mind anything the woman would say since most of it would be nonsense. But Roy added, "And you didn't miss church. It's just now Friday."

"Friday," said Miss Erskine. "Friday and a clear day and summertime. I had it all right. And you are Barlowes, but you ain't out chopping or hoeing or ploughing. Is there somebody dead?"

Roy turned his hat around and around in his hands for a minute. He looked at his dad, but just got a glare and a "go on" motion. He wished he was back in one of the fields, where he spent most of his time. Finally, he said, "We came up here so I could talk to you some."

Miss Erskine dropped her sewing into her lap. She was easy to tire. She had a wrecked body, wrecked from all those babies, Roy's daddy said, though only her Sally had made it up past four years old. She was ruined for any kind of work and even talking to a boy made her brow grow damp and her breath come in little shallow sips. She sat quiet for a minute.

When she finally did speak, she looked past Roy. She spoke straight to his dad. "Is it that late, already?"

Mr. Barlowe cleared his throat. "I guess it is, Erskine."

"You want to tie my little child up to this wool-headed boy and get all of Townie's fields with her."



Roy took a little step back from the old woman—he couldn't help but think of her as old from the way she looked, even though he had two sisters older than her—and watched her slump back against the house and breathe hard after she spoke up.

He could tell that his dad still wanted him to do the talking, so he skipped to the very end. "Look here, Miss Erskine, our places join up all the way from the road to the river. Ain't nothing but fence line keeps them apart and y'all have let that get blown down a lot of the way. Sally is a strong girl and she's got up to where she could get married. And I'm up to where I could get married, too."

Roy didn't know what the woman was thinking, didn't know that she was wondering if old Noah Harpe had sent her Townie up Bittersweet Creek in his Sunday suit this same way 24 years ago. She'd been 14 and never seen a man she wasn't kin to when her mama had packed her up on the back of the wagon, both of them crying. Then it was babies and cooking and tobacco and none of the babies amounting to nothing until sweet Sally, the 12th, when Erskine was 24.

Ten years older than Sally was now.

Roy's dad knew some of that, though, and spoke up again. "The boy's right, Erskine. And even if he hadn't made up his own mind about it—" Miss Erskine rolled her eyes but Mr. Barlowe kept talking. "Even if he hadn't made up his mind, we done worked this all out a long time ago. Don't tell me you don't remember. I stood right here and talked this out with you and Townie before he went to his rest. There was some promises made about us taking care of this place and it's past time we kept them. And you made a promise, too."

Roy looked away from his two elders, out over the little valley below them. The fields were wild with weeds, even some young trees. No crops in them and no cattle. The little plot of garden was the only untangled place he could see.

When he looked back, he saw that Miss Erskine was looking over at the fields, too. She picked up her sewing and said, "I remember." His dad seemed to think that decided something and put on his hat.

Roy put on his own as she said, "Y'all go on before the Sun gets low and the girl heads home from the river."

SALLY WASN'T AT THE RIVER, THOUGH. SHE WAS ON the stony bluff where Willow Ridge shoots up from the north bank. She was walking along a mud track, barefoot, her arms full of wildflowers.

They bury in the backwoods in that country. Bottomland is too fertile to waste on the dead. The cemeteries are all up in the hills, under the poplars, and the ground in them is choked with roots and rocks.

Sally picked her way past Burtons and Sapps and Barlowes to the little cluster of Harpe markers at the back of the graveyard. The first three were just dark slabs of limestone, already melting away. These hadn't lived long enough even to get names, so she didn't know whether it was brothers or sisters of hers she lay flowers for.

Then one with some writing on it. She knew what it said so she didn't have to puzzle over it like most of the writtendown words she came across. It said, "*Townsend Harpe, Jr. Beloved of the Lord 1881-1884.*"

Then two more with no names, then one stone with four, all girls who died within a few days of each other. The same crude slashes of letters that had named her oldest brother named these sisters Mary, Naomi, Angela, Carolina. A fever took them, her mother had told her once.

All these and a half-dozen more clustered around the big marker, the one for her daddy. Sally had traced it out once, the year she went to school. It was the first thing she had learned to read. "*Townsend Harpe, Sr. Blessed Husband & Father & Charles His Son.*"

When her mother had still had breath in her to tell Sally sto-

ries, Erskine had told the tale of that stone. Townie—and Sally could just remember the big man, she'd been about four when he died—had carried his last boy up to the ridge to bury him. He'd gone by himself, Erskine was too weak from the birth. "It must have been his heart give out on him," her mama had said, "digging in that froze-up ground."



Sally was laying the last of her flowers across the stone when she heard a whistle, something like a bird call. She laughed. "Is that supposed to be a blue jay that's got its beak busted up, Joel Cornett? 'Cause that's the only bird I can think of that might sound anything like that."

A sandy-haired boy, about her age, trotted into the graveyard, grinning. "Ain't all of us spend our time listening to birds and talking back at them, girl."

"I don't know what you *do* spend your time on, then. Cornetts sure don't work any." She was already running by the time she said the last word.

And so he chased her, like he had all summer.

Down off the ridge, along an old logging road cut out of the side of the hill that was split its whole length by gullies and washes. She ran down the track, leaping the ditches and swinging around the saplings that thrust up from the red ground, the boy right behind her.

When they came into the bottom she cut off the road and down into a creek bed. She slowed. The soles of her feet were hard with calluses this late in the summer, but the creek gravel was still harder running than the road. Joel closed the gap a little, splashing in and out of the water, watching for the banks of clay where he could move faster so long as he didn't slip.

Just above the junction of creek and river, and the deep pool where Sally had stretched the trotlines she'd come out to check, was a clearing filled with ferns. She let him catch her there, like she had the past three or four times they'd raced.

He hooked his arm around her waist and they rolled down, laughing. She let him kiss her some, sharp and hot and fast, like sparks cracking out of a green log on a fire. But she kept an arm across her chest, where she knew his hands would be coaxing at her.

"Come on, Sally," he said, and she laughed again because he had the same whine in his voice that pups had sometimes. "Come on, it's all right. It's all right now."

Then she pulled away from him because he was moving his whole body up against her and it scared her when he did that, when his breath got shallow and he kept saying the same thing over and over. "You leave it alone, Joel," and hadn't she said *that* over and over? "There's things that's left to married people."

Joel leaned back, then grinned at her. "Well then let's get married, Sally. If me and you are going to get married then it's all right. That makes it all right."

Sally sat up and looked at him. She worked her jaw up and down and felt her eyes open up wide, felt them start to glisten. "You ask me right," she said.

Joel grinned wider. He scrambled up onto his knees. "Sally Harpe, will you marry me?" Then he flopped back down beside her.

Sally nodded. "Uh-huh. Yes." She couldn't stop crying but she was happy. She guessed that the stunned, tingly feeling was a kind of happy. Joel lay her back down, but she shook her head and turned from him again.

"It's all right, I said, Sally," frustrated, that note in his voice again. But Sally kept shaking her head.

"No, Joel, we have to wait. That's the way and don't tell me Cornetts do it different because I ain't no Cornett yet."

She started to stand up and was surprised that Joel didn't try to keep her down. He just settled back like he was think-

ing. He said, "Well, there's some things people that's promised can do, I guess. If they're promised."

Sally knew about promises. Her mama had a whole pack of stories about what happened to people who broke them. She beetled her honey-colored eyebrows. "What are you talking about now?"

"Here, Sally, here." And this time when he leaned to kiss her he didn't try to snake over her, but took her hand instead. And kissed her and whispered to her and moved her hand down.

She breathed along the same as he did. Her arm was trembling a little, tensed up, but she moved her hand where he guided her, how he guided her. And he kissed her and whispered to her, his whispers ragged now.

He stayed laid down after, even when she stood up and went splashing around in the creek, bathing her hands. Sally felt solemn and quiet, but Joel laughed again. "It's all right, Sally."

Sally didn't feel like looking at him, but she bobbed her head up and down and said, "Because we're promised. That's right, isn't it, Joel?"

"Don't you doubt it," he said, finally getting to his feet. "And I know all them haunt stories your mama tells you talk about promises, don't they? I guess I'd better keep this one, hadn't I?"

Sally looked at him sharp. "We'd both better, Joel Cornett."

Joel started to laugh, but didn't. He pointed up through the trees. "You better get your fish and head to the house."

Sally looked at the Sun herself and saw that he was right. She trotted up for a quick kiss on the cheek before she ran down the creek.

H

er mama didn't say anything about the time when Sally busted into the kitchen. Sally counted that odd but kept still about it, just pulled down the cleaning knife from the peg where it hung by a leather cord. While she cut the heads off the catfish and scraped away at the scales, Erskine warmed up a pot of beans and mixed cornmeal with water and black pepper.

When Erskine finally did speak, Sally felt her heart jump up in her throat. Erskine said, "You're about old enough to get married now, I guess."

"Mama?" Sally thought she must have heard wrong. Could things work out that easy?

"Roy Barlowe is old enough to look after his own place now, especially since all his gang of brothers live right down there and can help him. I'll move down into your little room and you two can take mine and your daddy's."

Sally stopped filleting the catfish. "Roy Barlowe?" She didn't understand.

"His daddy will need him until they finish stripping the tobacco, though. That'll give us time to see about a dress and all that business."

It had been a long time since Erskine had talked to her so much at a stretch. She kept filling in the places where Sally would have said something if her throat hadn't felt frozen up. She said, "You've known the Barlowes all your life, you've got that much."

Erskine took the knife from Sally's fingers and sliced a long piece of the fish, soft and white. That was usually Sally's job. Her mother dropped the piece into the batter and spooned lard into the cast iron skillet. It spat at her, and still Sally couldn't talk.

The fish went into the pan and while they fried, Sally slumped down onto the bench beside the oak table. Erskine steadied herself against the table and said, "It's done, honey. You'll get used to it. You don't even have to leave your house like I did. And those Barlowes have been good neighbors to us."

The fish started smoking and Erskine turned back to the stove so she almost didn't hear Sally say, "I can't."

Erskine moved the fish onto a pair of wooden plates. "I know you don't think so, honey, but you'll be all right. I'll still be right here in the house."

But Sally shook her head. "I'm sorry, Mama. I can't. I'm not going to marry Roy Barlowe."

Erskine drew up. "It's done, Sally. You've been promised. It's done."

"I didn't promise to marry that boy!" Sally was crying now, trembling.

"Don't carry on, girl. You been promised to him a long time. Your daddy worked it out with Mr. Barlowe before he passed. They'll take good care of us, Sally. You're promised."

Sally stood, suddenly, and grabbed the knife from where it lay on the stove. She said, "I can't keep that promise, Mama. I'd use this on myself before I did."

Erskine moved faster than Sally had seen her do in a long time. She slapped the back of Sally's hand and sent the knife flying away. "Girl, 14 is old enough to marry and it ought to be old enough to not talk that kind of foolishness. You remember what happens to girls that can't keep their promises before they go."

Sally screamed at her mother, defying her, "I don't believe those tales anymore!"

Erskine took Sally's wrist and sat her back down on the bench. "Oh, you don't, do you? Too big to believe in the Lonesome Girls? I suppose you don't wonder why the birds the old Crow Man sends to steal corn for his supper don't eat it themselves, then. I suppose you don't still walk out of that graveyard you're always stealing off to backwards when you get caught up there in the rain."

Sally didn't say anything, just stared at the floor.

"Girl, my mama told me about those girls, and she had it from her mama and on back like that. Your granny was a Christian woman and kept the commandments. She knew what walked this old world.

"You want to stay caught in the clay instead of rising up to be with the saints? Because you will be. You'll stay in your cold grave if you break this promise.

"Those girls might look as pretty and white as the Moon but they're the damned of the Earth, Sally. They claw out of their coffins and dance when they can, they catch fool men when they can, but they're as tormented as if they was in the Lake of Fire.

"And they're cut off, girl. Cut off for eternity from the love of the Lord. You don't want that, do you? Do you?"

Sally shook her head.

BUT SALLY HARPE WAS 14, AND THE TOBACCO had just been put up to cure so there were weeks and weeks until stripping time. There was time to sneak off to the woods, time to whisper and laugh, yet. Time and time.

Time to get bold and listen to Joel Cornett talk big about running off to Bowling Green or Lexington, or even Louisville. Time to watch the leaves turn and feel the wind get chill and then it was time to give thanks.

Time for all the souls in that country to gather and to give thanks, to break bread, to bring out the fiddle and the pipe, to dance and leap before the Lord as the preachers excused it.

So it was this bold Sally that bundled Miss Erskine up onto the wagon seat and guided their old mare down to the Stone's Camp meeting house. Such a crowd was there already that she had to park the wagon in the road and hobble the horse in the parsonage yard.

Erskine was getting on more poorly since the weather turned colder, so they'd eaten at home and only driven down to listen to the music and watch the dancing.

Sally hoped to do more than watch. She was flushed with excitement, looking around at all the people. She barely even nodded when a Barlowe woman said, "Roy's gone off to get a deer for us to roast, Sally. Isn't that fine?"

Joel was already out there, cutting up with his Cornett cousins, boys even rougher than him. He ran across the stamped-down yard and leaped, *tumbled* over the middle bonfire, the biggest one. If he heard the music he wasn't minding it, he moved out of step with all the couples reeling around him.

They'd pulled some pews out into the yard and Sally found a spot on one for her mother. Erskine moved to make a place for Sally, her Sally who was gone when she looked up.

Sally heard her name being called. "Sally Harpe!" Erskine cried while Joel spun and spied her and said, "Sally!"

The fiddles started in for real, then, and even gray old men nodded their heads, keeping time. The young men went wild, grabbed their wives or their sweethearts and flung them through the air, stomped and jumped and spun.

So Sally flew. Sally felt his hands on her waist more than she felt her feet on the packed ground. She laughed and screamed when he threw her highest and even let him kiss her. She let him kiss her right there in the firelight, in front of all the churchgoers, in front of her mama, in front of all those Cornetts and Barlowes.

TO SALLY, STANDING IN FRONT OF HIM, IT LOOKED like Joel had grown antlers. But then he was on the ground, buried under the carcass of a deer and Roy Barlowe was standing beside the fire. His coat was streamed with blood from where he'd carried the deer across his shoulders.

He was staring off to the side, and it took Sally a minute to realize that the shouting she was hearing was Mr. Barlowe, yelling at his son, yelling, "Keep on him! Keep on him!" So Roy bent over to where Joel was struggling under the deer and wailed on him with big bunched fists.

Joel's head was caught between the deer's neck and the ground so his shouts were muffled. Sally leaned in to roll the animal off him, but hands dragged her back. Some Cornett women were saying, "Come over here to the side, girl," while their husbands and brothers pushed Roy back and pulled the deer off Joel.

But then big Barlowe men were there, too, and the music died and people were shouting and running. Some preachers were there and pulled at the men, yelled at them, but it did no good.

Sally pulled away from Joel's kin and tried to make her way back to the fire. But a fence of men had sprung up, and she could only look though their locked arms and see Joel standing, blinking the blood out of his eyes. Roy Barlowe had shrugged off some other Cornetts and was there to slap Joel back to the ground.

"You smack him back, Joel!" a woman screamed.

And Joel did. He found his ground for a little time and the others slowed, muttering, waiting to see which way things would go. The boys went back and forth, punching and tearing at each other, gripping and staggering in a smaller circle of their kin. Sally still couldn't break through the larger circle.

SO SHE COULD JUST WATCH. JOEL WAS FAST, SHE'D known that. Now she saw that he could be mean, that he must have been in fights before. But Roy didn't flinch or cry out no matter how Joel scratched at him or bit him, those big arms just squeezed and pummeled and Sally saw a scared look cross Joel's face because the other boy wasn't easing off any.

Then there was a hiss from a knot of Cornetts and Sally saw a flicker of firelight on steel and then Joel had a knife in his hand. He was staring at it but Roy didn't see it when he roared and took Joel up in a bear hug. And broke off, looking down at where red and yellow ran out of his stomach.

Then Sally screamed for sure and the Barlowes rushed in around Roy again. But he shrugged them off and yelled,

"No! No! Leave him!" So all those men backed off again, Cornetts to one side and Barlowes to the other.

There was cursing from among the Barlowes, "Throw him a knife!" But Roy yelled again, "No!"

The big boy lurched toward Joel, who stood with the knife, his hands moving around in little circles on their own, like they were afraid to stay still. Then Roy leaned down over the carcass of the deer and straddled it. Joel started toward him, almost like he meant to help him up.

He stopped though, and Sally saw what Joel had seen, what they'd all seen. The strain on Roy's face wasn't from pain but from effort. The sound around the bonfires dropped off to nothing, nothing but the cracks and pops of the burning wood, then a louder crack, then another, and Roy Barlowe stood with two bloody antlers in his hands. Stood and moved toward Joel Cornett with the buck's rack broken into talons.

He roared and his kin roared with him, and the Cornetts and the Barlowes rushed toward one another. But all the other men there had seen too much and the circle holding Sally back broke as they all rushed in.

Sally went with them, she careened among the struggling, cursing men, looking for her promised. She shouldered a Barlowe or a Cornett to one side and finally found where the boys staggered against each other. Roy held Joel's wrist like a vise, keeping the knife from finding him yet again. His other arm was wrapped around the smaller boy's back, the antler in that hand weakly scraping Joel's side. The other antler hung from where it was caught in the bloody mess of Joel's cheek.

The way cleared and she ran full at the boys, tucking herself between them. They fell back, bloody and exhausted, not looking at her. She followed Joel as he stumbled, touching her hands to the torn open places at this thigh, his stomach, his face.

"Joel," she said, horrified. "Joel."

He brought his hand up and caught his fingers in the horns piercing him. He pushed out and the antler flew away. She started to daub at his cheek with her fingers but he was looking past her, bringing up the knife.

"No!" Sally screamed. "Stop it! Stop it!"

But they were on each other again, barely able to raise their arms but trying, trying to slice or stab. And she was between them, pushing and screaming. They lurched back and forth over the wet ground, scrambling, leaning against one another in a tangle.

Then finally, finally, the tangle fell apart, Roy to one side, into the mud churned up by his feet and his blood, Joel to the other, falling hard against the broken carcass of the deer, and Sally, exhausted, fell face first to the ground, her hair and skirts spilling out around her.

Then a gun sounded into the night sky and horses came ranging in. Men were yelling, "Order! Let's get some order here!"

They could have stayed quiet though, because still fell onto the gathering of its own accord. Erskine Harpe had crossed the way to where her daughter lay. She knelt in the mud and turned the girl over. She cradled her last child's head to her and crooned and left it to somebody else to pull the antler from the girl's heart.

JOEL CORNETT BLINKED AND SHOOK HIS HEAD—quietly, softly—but the red didn't pass from his eyes. Not that he had expected it to. He'd watched the world through that bloody haze for months now, ever since the Barlowe boy had ruined his sight. His sight and his breath and his legs.

But Joel had taken some things from Roy as well, he figured. Otherwise, the bigger boy would have heard him sometime tonight in the hours Joel had stalked him through the snow.

Joel gripped the pistol his uncle had given him weeks ago

and watched Roy shift a deer's carcass on his slumped shoulders, resting against a tree.

Roy's breath billowed out into the cold night, faster and harder than it would have in the summer. Joel supposed Roy's wounds had all closed up by now, as his own had, mostly. He'd seen that Roy favored the side where the terrible slash in his belly had been, though. No, if Joel wasn't as strong as he had been, neither was Roy Barlowe.

Roy *had* been able to get out some evenings lately and take his gun to get a little meat. Not so late as this usually, Joel knew. Not so long after dark and not so far from home as this wounded buck had led him.



ed the both of them, Joel thought. He'd been stealing after Roy since the snows fell, waiting for a night like this, a night when Roy had made a poor shot, a slow killing shot and had to track drips and smears of blood way off Barlowe land, over Miss Erskine's wild fields and up onto the Willow Ridge. Waiting for this very time, when the Moon was bright enough to give him a clear shot at Roy from where he hid in some bushes.

But then the clouds slid over the Moon again and Joel lost his aim in the dark. Joel cursed under his breath, then thought he'd been too loud because he heard Roy speak. But no, Roy wasn't calling him. Joel could just make out Roy's words. He was praying.

"Now you look out for Roy, Lord. That girl didn't come to harm on my account. You watch over Roy I pray. You keep him from harm."

That girl. Joel had pushed the reason for his wounds back into himself. His family never spoke about it except to curse the Barlowes. And Roy didn't seem the type to dwell on that business. Why?

"Oh," and this time Joel did speak aloud but neither he nor Roy noticed. They were both staring at the low stones spread out between them.

Joel didn't know whether Roy had been to this place since he'd fought, but he'd stayed far away, himself. Until tonight. If he'd been paying attention, if he'd been watching where the deer led them instead of watching for a clear shot, he never would have come out onto this part of the ridge.

The stones of the little graveyard were just dark shapes against the woods. The wind picked up a little and the clouds blocking the moonlight grew even thicker. But then the markers stood out clear in the dark, clear in pale, cold light.

"What?" That was Roy and he was letting the deer slide to the ground, so Joel didn't think he heard the scrabbling sound when it started. By the time Roy was trying to find its source, noise was coming from all around them.

The light got brighter, brighter than the Moon could have cast even if it wasn't hidden, but Joel couldn't see its source. The noise, though, he could track. It was coming from the ground.

Then a light like a lantern beam shot up from the earth before a stone there near Roy. The boy gaped at it, and then there was another, and another.

Joel didn't dare move from where he crouched as Roy started to back away. He saw Roy trip over the deer, saw that Roy's feet had managed to get caught under its body somehow.

Hands were following the light out of the ground, clean and white for all that they were thrusting out from the dirt. Hands, wrists, shoulders, then the long tresses of girl children. Girls were climbing up from their graves.

Joel wanted to scream or cry but he couldn't find his

voice. He wanted to run but he couldn't stand. Across the way, he saw that Roy had stopped struggling under the deer. A dozen or more of the pale, cold girls—it was *them* casting the light Joel saw—shrugged and stretched, then loped over to the tree where Roy lay trapped.

One of the taller ones gazed down at Roy. Joel saw that there wasn't any color to her at all. Her hair and her lips and even her eyes were that cold white. Even then, he felt like he should know her, should know all of them. The way they held their shoulders, their clothes, they looked like his cousins and Roy Barlowe's sisters and like any of the girls at the church.

The tall one moved her hand then, a quick flick like she was shooing a fly. The deer laying over Roy shuddered, then stood. It hesitated, blood dripping out of the hollow place where Roy had cleaned out its guts, then sprang into the dark. But Roy still didn't move.

Didn't until she moved her hand again. Some of his old strength must have come back to him because he leaped to his feet. "What?" Roy said again. Then he said it over and over in a queer hiccupping rhythm. "What? What? What?"

They didn't answer him, just swayed around him and stared him down. Then the hand again and Roy Barlowe, big, stodgy Roy, danced.

He fought it, Joel could tell. Roy fought his own legs and arms with all the strength that was left him. But the girls swayed, so Roy did, and he spun. He circled and swooped and stomped across the cemetery, hurdling their torn-open graves. He slammed against the stones and wore the wild-eyed look of a man who didn't know himself. But then it stopped.

It stopped and he was on his knees before a grave that Joel knew, that they both knew though neither had dared visit it. There was no writing on the headstone; Miss Erskine didn't have any money left for the carving. Dried flowers were strewn around.

Those girls, too, they were all around, still quiet, still staring. Roy sobbed, choking on air. And the ground in front of him trembled a little. Was the light streaming from that grave a little warmer than the lights of the others, wondered Joel? Did this hand hesitate, shy away from scratching in the cold ground?

Whether she wanted to or no, Joel couldn't judge. She came, though. She lurched up out of the earth the way the others had. And by the time she stood before Roy, Joel could hardly pick her out from the others. White, all white and cold, even her eyes.


Then it was *her* hand that moved, and she danced with Roy.

She didn't draw breath, though, she didn't gasp in the chill. She didn't stumble, her legs didn't give out time and again. She didn't half climb up from the ground to keep numbly moving and turning. Her face stayed white, it didn't grow redder and redder.

She didn't blink fast at tears that wouldn't stop streaming. She didn't fall. It wasn't her that finally fell.

Joel stared at where Roy lay face down in the graveyard, unmoving in a pool of light. Then he realized that his arms and legs were tingling, that he could move them again.

He didn't wait. He lurched to his feet and stumbled away from the clearing. The girls made no move to follow and for a minute he felt hope. Then a shape flew out of the darkness and Joel was stunned by the force and pain of a tearing at his face and a blow to his chest. He was on the ground again, under the unmoving carcass of a deer. His head was bent to the ground so he didn't see her when she approached. He saw her light, though.

He was trembling a little, tensed up, but he moved the way she guided him. 



My last lover was a hero.

A beautiful, chisel-jawed,

shining-smiled, bulky pec'd man who

dumped me cold for the first Queen of Forever that battered lashes his way. Let me say this straight right now: I didn't expect him to stay with me—not for eternity. But when he came washing up on my shore, bruised and swollen and half-starved, we made a deal.

I'd take care of the multiheaded sea monster he'd gotten himself into trouble with and he'd stay on my island for the summer. In exchange for a little body heat, I'd dance for him.

YOU THINK IT'S EASY BEING A FEMME FATALE? HERE'S THE REAL STORY.

By Devon Monk Illustration by Charles Demorat

Believe me, being supple-spined made for some spectacular dance positions.

But Perseus had all the moves. Tough as a sailor, charming as a midnight poet, and that smile....

I, the good little monster, slogged through the cold salt water to face down his foe. I, the good little monster, got a knock to the head trying to lock the serpent into stone and I, the good little monster, practically froze to death right then and there.

Would it have killed him to thank

me? When I finally came to and made my way back to civilization, all I heard was: "Perseus cut off Medusa's head, Perseus used it for a shield, Perseus saved the swooning beauty." The lout hooked up with some queen, spread a bunch of rumors about decapitating me and using my head, my *head*, to bring down the sea serpent. He left me, head intact and heart broken, behind.

Not even a farewell, Medusa, my almost love. Over the years, I've begun to wonder if he had it planned all along. Make the monster fall in love, send her out to fight while he puts a move on the queen, and pray the monster doesn't surface until the wedding wine has gone to dregs.

I should have turned him to stone when I had the chance—before I fell in love.

A knock at my door broke my reverie. I crossed the living room, bare feet scuffing carpet and shooting static across my scalp. The snakes on my head swayed as if they were high on hair spray. I swatted at them with one hand and looked through the peephole.

DUST!



A dark-haired man stood against Seattle's unbreakable gray. His skin was brown, almost black in contrast with his loose, white cotton shirt. Wide-shouldered, he was taller than me and strong-boned. Handsome. I did not look in his eyes, but I suspected they would be gray, or blue.

My heart raced and the snakes hissed. I do not believe in reincarnation or any of those other quaint attempts at eternal life. But when he smiled, I saw again the cliff, smelled again the salt breezes brushing my skin. A ship rounded the cove, sail swollen with wind, and the man on deck smiled at me.

The man outside my door picked up one of my rabbit statues from the flower bed. He turned it over in his hand, stroking the stone fur, and set it back down. He frowned and knocked on the door again.

"I don't mean to intrude," he called, "but I've been watching Jenny take your statues into town. Are there any left for sale?"

My mind told me to say no. He had all the makings of a hero, including an accent I could not place. But I needed the money. Being immortal doesn't guarantee unlimited riches. My statues sell best during tourist season, and the last warmth of summer had faded away weeks ago, taking the tourists, and my income, with it.

I crossed the room to the mantle and put on my mirrored sunglasses. The reflective lenses wouldn't help much; it was me looking into other people's eyes, not other people looking into mine, that caused all the trouble. But if I were very careful, we wouldn't make eye contact. The man would buy a statue, I'd have some money to pay Jenny to pick up my groceries, and I could go back to drifting through my memories.

"Come in."

The snakes hung quietly at my shoulders, brown, not green as the myths would have you believe. With a bit of concentration, I can influence the observer to see them as beaded braids against my tanned skin. I am not beautiful like my far-sisters, the Sirens, who pose for those tasteful pornography magazines. When I put my mind to it, I can be passably exotic.

"Welcome to my home," I said over my shoulder, "Mr. ...?"

"Jason's fine."

I smiled. It was always comforting to hear old names.

"Jason," I turned and stared at his forehead, "what kind of statues are you looking for?"

"I'm not sure, really. These are beautiful." He wandered across the room, hands clasped behind his back as if he were in an art gallery. His hair was longer than I thought, drawn together in a band at the nape of his neck. Silk through my fingers, if I dared touch him.

Colorful stone birds clung to the ceiling, butterflies and dragonflies decorated the walls like polished pebbles. Two bear cubs held a sheet of glass between their shoulders, and in the corner, a fawn stood, its sweet face wide-eyed with fright.

"These are my earlier works."

"You have more?" His voice warmed the room and I had the sudden urge to invite him to stay. It had been a long time since I had spoken with anyone, except Jenny, about anything. Immortality isn't all it's cracked up to be.

"There are a few statues in the backyard," I said, moving past him. Warm fingers brushed my shoulder and I glanced back.

He was standing too close, hand slightly raised. He smiled and I wondered what his eyes would show me.

"Thank you for opening your door to a stranger, Ms. ...?"

"Gorgriou." And to fill the silence, "Are you a friend of Jenny's?"

"No, not really. I helped her load one of your bigger pieces into her truck a few weeks ago. I've seen animal statues before," he paused, his mouth pulling down into a slight frown again, "but none so ... tactile. Since then I've watched Jenny come and go, bringing your groceries." He shrugged. "I guess I became curious and wanted to see more."

"Come this way," I said, leading him down the hallway to the back door. He followed so closely I could feel the heat radiating through his cotton shirt. He should not be here. I should tell him to

leave. Ah, Perseus, why did you break my heart? The snakes stirred, an odd scraping of scales that could pass for beads against beads. I whispered a calming prayer in a very old language and opened the back door.

Sunlight broke through the clouds, illuminating the yard like a gathering place of spirits.

Timing is everything.

I smiled, happy for the light that warmed the cool autumn day. The wind rose, bringing with it damp smells of earth and sweet pine needles. I thought of an island far away and breathed deeply of my memories.

"Striking," Jason moved past me with solid, quiet steps. Fox, coyote, and turtle stood with snake and raccoon. A deer that had grazed my herb garden one too many times stood frozen in midstep. In the center was my favorite: a hawk perched on a slab of oak, wings stretched for flight, eyes searching a forbidden sky.

Jason walked among them, stroking fur and scales with appreciative fingers, his breath coming more quickly.

"Warm," he said. "The textures are so lifelike—I almost expect a heartbeat." He reached the end of the line of statues and shook his head. "You make it difficult to choose, Ms. Gorgriou."

I opened half-lidded eyes. Sunlight makes me sleepy. "Oh?"

"There isn't anything here I don't like." And he smiled.

I am a champion body language reader. But neither his body nor his voice told me what he meant by that. Did he want to buy all of the statues, or was he just trying to charm me? One glance at his eyes would settle my curiosity, but human statues only draw a good price if they are nude.

That thought brought blood to my cheeks and stirred up feelings I thought long gone. I shrugged and took a deep breath.

"You may take a statue for free—for the help you've given Jenny." And then you can leave and take that damned smile with you before I start thinking of deals we'll both regret, I added silently.

"Thank you, but these are worth paying for."

"And also worth giving. Please, take one—any one, except the hawk." The snakes shifted again although there was no breeze. I didn't care if he noticed.

He bent, scooped up a statue, his fingers restless over its surface. "I'd love to see any new statues you may have in the next couple of weeks."

"Fine." I held the door open with my arm and stared straight ahead at the forest that borders my backyard. "Thank you for coming by." I looked over his head as he moved past me.

He took a breath, but I continued, "And thank you again for helping Jenny. I'm sure you can find your way out."

The monster is tired now.

Silence, then the fall of footsteps through my house and finally, the thump as the front door closed.

I stood in the sun, cold and oddly vulnerable. The snakes rose, weaving in the pale sunlight, tongues tasting the air. I thought of ancient worlds and ancient deals. When I finally did come back to the present, it was nearly dusk. I sighed and realized I hadn't seen which statue Jason took.

I scanned the grass. The statues stared at me with glassy, unsettling eyes. Raccoon, turtle, fox were all accounted for. Only one tiny statue I had tucked by the foot of the deer was missing—a thin, coiled snake.

I drew a shaky breath and walked back to my house. Gentle tongues flicked over my cheeks, as surprised as I at the tears that were there.

Two weeks slipped by beneath Seattle's brittle rains. Jenny came with groceries and new books. We didn't talk much, having nothing new to say. I gave her the last of my statues except the hawk, to take into the grocery store and sell for half their summer price.

She was loading the statues when I heard voices outside the door. I pulled back the blinds and peered out.

Jason stood in the bed of Jenny's rusted white Ford, his back

toward me. I watched, caught between fascination and envy as blonde-haired, farm-fresh Jenny showed him the statues. He touched each one, tipped them to better catch the light, a slight frown on his lips, then, to my surprise, he handed Jenny a wad of folded bills.

She grinned and after a few words and gestures, they hopped out of the truck bed and got into the cab. The Ford growled and rumbled out of view.

Suddenly, I wondered about Jason's motives. Was he really just a curious neighbor, or was he from some obscure environmentalist group? Were there tests that would reveal what my statues really were? I had once dropped a stone squirrel and found its tiny skeletal structure scattered in the dust. But if Jason dropped a statue and found the bones, would he believe I was so thorough an artist that I would create a complete skeletal structure? Perhaps,

I AM NOT BEAUTIFUL LIKE MY FAR-SISTERS, THE SIRENS, WHO POSE FOR THOSE TASTEFUL PORNOGRAPHY MAGAZINES.

but what would I tell him about the stone lungs and stone hearts?

I paced the room, snakes writhing. The last thing I needed was a bunch of tree-huggers picketing my front lawn.

I could go to him and demand to know why he was so interested in my work. Intimidating people is something I do well. Of course, I'd probably attract the attention of my other neighbors and end up with an entire block of statues.

The idea had merit, but eventually the police would investigate.

The snakes rose, angry and hissing. If trouble came, I would handle it.

And if Jason came, I would handle him, too.

I cranked up the heat in the house and curled up in my electric blanket, determined to lose myself to the peace of my memories, but all I could think of were the smiles of heroes I should have turned to stone.

I wasn't surprised to hear a knock at the door a few hours later. I paced into the living room and peeked through the peephole, expecting to see Jenny there, with the wad of bills in her hand.

Instead I saw Jason standing in the rain, one hand shoved in the pocket of his denim jacket, the other holding a bottle of wine. Even wet, he looked good.

"Go away."

"Ms. Gorgriou, it will just take a minute. I have a proposition that may interest you."

Silence.

"I'm not leaving until you let me in."

Fine, I thought. I can take care of you easily enough. You'd make a nice addition to the backyard.

"Please come in, Jason." I slipped my dark glasses on and unlocked the door.

Better talk fast, hero.

Jason came in and held out the bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon. "I brought this to celebrate," he said.

"Oh?"

"You see, Ms. Gorgriou—may I call you Dusi? Jenny mentioned that was your first name."

Jenny has a big mouth. I smiled sweetly. "Certainly."

"Dusi, I haven't been completely honest with you."

Countdown to concrete, I thought.

Five ...

"I am a field representative for a group based out of San Francisco."

Four ...

"Your statues caught my eye. They are so amazingly real, almost too good to be true."

Three ...

"So I had to investigate." He smiled. "I'm glad you let me in the other day."

Two ... I fingered the edge of my sunglasses and lowered my gaze from his forehead to his eyebrows.

"I am authorized to pay you four times your current asking price for your statues, provided you let us display them exclusively through our galleries."

One never hit. I blinked, and quickly looked back at his forehead. "Galleries?"

"In San Francisco. I'm vacationing. I already sent the snake statue down to the gallery director. He loved it!" He laughed, a rich, warm sound that sent shivers across my skin.

"He thinks you're the discovery of the century and I couldn't agree with him more."

Discovery. I rolled the word in my mind and decided it was a much nicer way to say monster.

"How long would you represent my work?" I asked, thinking of the long touristless, and cashless, winter. "Is there a contract?"

He fished inside his jacket and handed me an envelope. "Five years, a substantial advance and renewal options."

No more wondering if I could eat from month to month. I licked my lips and pulled out the papers. I took my time reading every word. It was a deal, after all, and deals and heroes don't mix. But for once, this deal seemed wholly in my favor.

"Where do I sign?"

He gave me his pen, watched as I signed with large flowing letters. I used my full name, Medusa Gorgriou.

I smiled. "Now what?"

"A celebration."

Late afternoon slid into night. We emptied the wine bottle and I learned about his job, which he loved, his life in San Francisco, which he loved to hate, and the woman who divorced him seven years ago. "I miss her," he sighed, "but I knew it was only a matter of time. She and I are too different."

He looked at me, trying to catch my eyes through my glasses. "Do you always wear those?"

"No." It was my turn to smile.

"You are beautiful, Dusi."

I laughed. "Meet my sisters and you would change your mind." I tilted my glass and caught the last drop of red wine on the tip of my tongue.

"I've never seen anyone even half as graceful and ..." he paused, searched the ceiling. I studied his profile and liked what I saw. Strong chin and hooked nose, and wide forehead lined with thoughts I could not see.

"Mysterious. Mystical."

I averted my eyes. Close, Hero. Mythical.

He leaned forward, his hand sliding across the back of the couch to cup my shoulder. Heat spread against my skin and I closed my eyes at the sudden pleasure of it. It had been hundreds of years since anyone had touched me.

Warm breath brushed my cheek. I parted my lips, wanting to fall into his warmth, wanting Jason around me, inside me, the sharp wine taste of him like a sun against the storm. But he was a hero and no matter how much I denied it, I was still a monster.

Somehow, I turned my head, away from his heat, away from his

BEING IMMORTAL DOESN'T GUARANTEE UNLIMITED RICHES.

touch. "It's late, Jason," I said in a voice far too calm for the emotions rushing through me.

He sat back, his mouth turned down in a thin line. "So it is." He stared at my profile for a moment, studying me. Then he ran his fingers through his hair and took a deep breath.

"Dusi, I'm going back to San Francisco tomorrow. I bought several of your pieces from Jenny and want to be there when they are picked up. The gallery will probably have an unveiling of our newest discovery. You should come with me."

"No."

Silence, except for the rain falling against the night.

It was the first time I had ever refused a hero. I liked it, and yet something inside me hurt.

"In case you change your mind, the phone number and everything else are on your copy of the contract." There was something behind his words that didn't belong in a hero's voice. Could it be sorrow? For a monster?

"I won't change my mind," I said. Because I can't. Too many people, too many chances to lose what I was finally gaining after thousands of years of wanting it—a chance to make my own choice, my own deals. A chance for respect.

He rose. "Well. Thank you, Dusi," he walked to the door.

"For what?"

"Opening your door to a stranger." He smiled and stepped out into the dark rain.

Ah, Perseus, why did you have to change me so? But it was not Perseus I saw in my mind. It was Jason.

Winter in Seattle isn't beautiful, it's just wet. I had enough money to buy new books, go out to a few movies and, with my sunglasses on, I even tried eating at a restaurant once.

Independence.

In my mind's eye I still stood on the cliffs of my past, but I no longer ached for an extinct world, being happy—happier, in the one in which I now existed.

But at night, a small part of me waited for the ship to sail around the cove, bringing a man whose smile had touched my heart.

When spring came, I threw myself into my work. Jason sent letters. I was the rage in San Francisco and the demand for my works were high.

Respect.

Not bad for a monster.

I wrote him back. Just business at first, and then the letters became more personal. I didn't tell him my secret, but I did mention my childhood in Greece and my brief love affair. He wrote poetry, which was not bad, and told me he had visited Greece and loved it and that he missed the moody skies of Seattle. I sent him a dozen roses on his birthday and ended up talking on the telephone with him for four hours. He was a nice man, I decided, even if he was a hero.

Spring brought days full of buzzing bees, little animals, and plenty of statue material. I sat just inside my back door, tiny stone bees scattered on the carpet beside me. I held my hand out, coaxing a squirrel in from the backyard. My dark glasses lay at my side as I waited for the squirrel to stand the way I wanted it to before I gave it the eye.

The front door opened. I turned and looked across the hallway—into Jason's eyes.

They were blue, with green, not gray, and rimmed with long, dark lashes.

I turned my head, unable to watch the change, unable to see him die. The squirrel jumped away and I stared at the carpet, hot with self-loathing. So the hero had gotten the bad end of the deal this time. Why cry? In a few thousand years there'd be another hero. But I knew that wasn't true. Jason had been more than a self-serving hero. He had been a friend.

"Dusi?"

I looked up.

Jason smiled down at me, alive.

"I don't understand," I said.

He shrugged. "Does it matter?"

"I'm a monster." My voice rose. "You should be dead. Stone!"

He nodded, taking the revelation too calmly.

"If I remember my myths correctly, you shouldn't be alive either. Weren't you supposed to be mortal?"

"Don't believe everything you read," I snapped. "Why are you still breathing?"

Jason took my hands and helped me stand.

"You are not a monster in my eyes, Dusi."

And as I watched, his eyes became the color of a dark sea. In them I saw endless reflections of ancient pain, sorrow, and languid summer joys. Things no mortal eyes could ever hold.

"You're immortal." I said.

He nodded. "I did not want to die, still having the thirst for a world left unexplored. Hera heard my plea and granted me eternal life in return for my services to her. But her gift came with a price. I would remain alive, but could love no mortal woman." He paused a moment, then, quietly, "Finding you has been the most wonderful gift, Dusi."

"Why? Are you here to kill me, Jason? Am I your next golden fleece? Your next monster to conquer?"

He smiled that smile of his, and I found myself wondering if I could kill him.

"No, Dusi. After seeing the statues, I was honestly just curious. I had heard the tales of you, of Perseus, but thought you both long dead. When I spent time with you I realized it wasn't curiosity that made me want to know you better." He shrugged and then looked me straight in the eyes. "I've fallen in love with you, Dusi."

That stopped all other questions short. I searched his face, amazed at the honesty there. I very gently touched his cheek.

"Love?"

"You have heard of it haven't you?" he dead-panned.

"Love," I repeated, trying to regain my footing. "Isn't that what comes right before betrayal?"

"Dusi, I would never..."

"Then I have two words for you: prenuptial agreement." How do you like that deal, Hero?

Jason seemed surprised, and actually, so was I. In the seconds he took to consider my offer, I relived centuries of self-doubt. Every other hero had run when I asked for anything more than casual promises.

Finally. "Are you asking me to marry you, Medusa? Because if that's what it takes to be near you, to be a part of your life, then I'll sign any paper you want."

I blinked. For once, the hero had agreed to *my* deal.

"That's part of what it takes," I said, warming to this idea.

He raised one eyebrow, waiting.

"I won't marry a man I've never kissed."

He smiled and drew me against him. And for the first time, I saw laughter in his eyes. ♣

ARRIVAL

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Taking fantastic art to a new dimension. BY JANE FRANK

JUST THE RIGHT MIX OF MEDIA



Frodo and Sam look a bit nervous on Mount Doom in one of Daniel Horne's Hobbit paintings.



THE ART OF

DANIEL HORNE

From the age of three, Daniel Horne's future was already set; there was never any question about his doing anything else but art. Over two hundred paperback covers, dozens and dozens of Fantasy role-playing game illustrations, and some wonderfully sculpted Fantasy figures later, Dan finds himself living in that future and enjoying every minute of it.

His mother, a professional doll maker, remembers Dan's childhood well, and isn't surprised in the least by the outcome. "I'd find his [drawing] notebooks in the bathroom, under the chairs, wherever he had been," she laughs, recalling that by 16 or 17 he was already into Fantasy art, drawing the big superheroes, and using his friends as models for his drawings of pirates and knights ... dressing them up in makeshift costumes and standing them on chairs, young warriors dressed to be knights carrying brooms for swords. For his part, Dan recalls that in his boyhood his mother was for a while a waitress, and every night she would bring him the menus that had a perfectly clean back page that he could fill in with sketches. He also recalls the phone calls to his mother from the nuns at school, complaining, "How can we get Daniel to stop drawing?"

Well, *you can't*. Be thankful for that, and be glad that these patterns of youth have persisted well into adulthood. Because Dan, if he had been able to stop drawing for just a minute, *might* have ended up as an archaeologist or a goalie for some professional ice hockey team (he coaches his son's team today). But



he's still drawing, and that's one of the main points of this story.

"I shoot all my own reference photos, and use my family and friends as models," he told me just yesterday. "Almost every one I know has had a part in my art. My children have posed as hobbits and my wife has played both a modern-day vampire and Merlin's mother, for a children's book. My father has posed as a Victorian headmaster for a Sherlock Holmes book cover, and my father-in-law has been a rabbi and the Wizard of Oz. Even the local fire chief, Skip Gib-

son, has posed as GI Joe and as a vampire slayer!" Those "friends of the artist" fortunate to have found themselves depicted in his art I'm sure are as much thunderstruck as amused to see themselves in these quite unconventional contexts (or so a few have told me) despite Dan's assurances that he alone "gets to play all the geeks."

Horne also makes all his own costumes, another talent that is serving him well in his own doll-making endeavors (more about that, below). The artist puts a lot of time and meticulous effort into his preparations for

paintings, and his characters, and that makes for an interesting home life. As he puts it, "My wife kids me, saying 'I never know what I'm going to see when I come home, handsome leading men, sexy barbarian women, or me running around like an orc!'"

Dan's studio has always been in his home, and his family and friends have always been "large" in his artistic life. He looks back to the grandmother who supplied the Russian fairy tales he heard as a child, and which he credits with fueling his

"fantastical" imagination. And he credits his mother, an accomplished doll maker in her own right, for passing on artistic talent and teaching him the skills that would later serve him well when designing his own line of Fantasy figures. And he loves his wife for understanding his passion for art. And he thanks his fellow artists, especially ones like his best friend Eric Peterson, for sharing his knowledge and pushing him to do his best, and never letting him be lazy. And he's always opened his studio to his children, for both Dan and his wife Joy (a music teacher who plays the viola) believe that you only get one chance to help your children grow.

All in all, Dan is a pretty traditional guy. And, today, that studio is more crowded than ever, what with his two artistically gifted children, Jennifer (11) and Andrew (8), his "studio gremlins," competing for space. But that's OK with Dan, because his children have always felt at home in his studio, where they are free to express their own artistic talents on their own "wall of fame" (just for their own artwork).

He makes his own armor (one chain mail shirt took him a year to produce), and he has a library of over a thousand books on costumes and armor and ancient history to consult for guidance on the details. Add to that a bunch of helmets and swords, and a variety of dresses in styles popular in the Middle

We don't think "My name is on the list" will get this guy into the party The Harum Guard is guarding. BOTTOM LEFT: All that Glitter may not be worth the effort, some dwarves learn.



Ages (his mom taught him to use a sewing machine when he was young; it's paid off), and you get the idea that this is a guy who's into verisimilitude. With his own cameras and darkroom, so he can get his characters "right" in conceptual form, he gets just enough information to add realism to the characters he's creating.

Dan's love of Ray Harryhausen's movies, the *Arabian Nights*, Tolkien, and the imagery of Edgar Allan Poe (among others) has been translated into highly realistic Fantasy paintings that have a touch of the dark side to them. But it was the sheer volume of work he was able to produce, combined with the powerfully imaginative nature of his Fantasy paintings, that made him a memorable student for Ken Laager, a

"7th generation Howard Pyle student" who was Dan's teacher and major inspiration, while he attended the York Academy of Art in Pennsylvania.

"From the very beginning, Dan was one of the most ardent of a small handful of young men who attached themselves to me as their mentor, early on," says Laager, a successful illustrator specializing in outdoor, Western, and historical adventure subjects, who at one point in his career—and fortuitously for Horne—taught part time at the school. According to Laager, "Over the years there have been maybe six guys who I've trained, who I've worked closely with in my studio, either working on my own canvases or working alongside me, independently. Dan was massively talented and incredibly motivated ... more than any other student I had known."

Dan also was singleminded in his focus, and by Laager's accounts, ruffled a few feathers at the Academy; he apparently neglected the required curriculum in favor of pursuing his own vision to become a Fantasy illustrator. "Dan was like a runaway train, singleminded in his creative vision, possessed of a powerful and wonderful imagination," Laager recalls, but to the young artist's credit, he was also open to Laager's approach to art. As Laager notes,

seized upon the works of N.C. Wyeth, in whose "bold images painted in a bold and reckless style, and with spontaneous color," Dan seemed to find a kindred spirit, "sharing Wyeth's philosophy ... not to paint as it really is, but as the subject *seems*."

For fans who are knowledgeable, the influence of these Brandywine artists can still be found in Dan's work today, as can others whom he cites as powerful influences on his work: the great 19th-century



Traditional fantasy often finds its place in this illustration for *Dragon at the World's End*. ABOVE, RIGHT: The *Spiral Dance* uses traditional Celtic imagery.

"I was the one who introduced Dan to the Howard Pyle school of illustration, and that became his chief influence." Dan, on the other hand, credits Ken for teaching him "to live in my paintings and to breathe life into the characters that I am painting."

Under Laager's tutelage, Horne also

French painter, Jean Leon Gerome; and English Pre-Raphaelite artists Sir Lawrence Alma Tadema, idyllic interpreter of the ancient world, and John Waterhouse, of whom Dan says, simply, "He showed me how to paint." Dan continues to learn from contemporary artists as diverse as Jack



Kirby and Patrick Woodruffe, but at the end of the day, this artist's work is really his own, "a mixture of the academic and modern," as Dan says, to be sure, and "an oil painter firmly rooted in the realist camp" ... but also with a style of expression unique to Daniel Horne.

In order to "paint as the subject *seems*," Dan prefers to have a copy of the manuscript of each book he illustrates before starting the assignment. Like most of the best illustrators working today, he dislikes having art directors steer him toward a particular scene, or being asked to attack an assignment based solely on a marketing department's verbal description of what would "sell" the book. He likes to *read* the story first, to get to know who the characters are and why they do things.

J.V. (Julie) Jones, whose novel *The Barbed Coil* (named "The best fantasy of the year" by SFX magazine) was illustrated by Horne and who personally owns the artwork ("It hangs above my fireplace, where it glows like polished brass."), has nothing but kudos for Dan. "[T]he test of a good illustrator is his attention to detail. The test of a good artist is his skill with light. Daniel Horne's work combines both. He reads the books he illustrates carefully, always on the lookout for those little details that can make a painting come to life." Jones described, in her novel, "buildings leaning inward to cut out the light." Of this description, she says, "Daniel took this idea and gave it life, creating a backdrop of timbered houses that loom over the figures like malevolent gods. The success of the illustration, however, lies in Daniel's use of light; firelight glows with real force, as if there's true heat behind it, and moonlight burns cold as ice. The effect of all this light can be seen on Tessa's [the heroine's] face, which is rendered so beautifully that one can sense the transparency of her skin." Isn't it amazing to hear what authors think of the images created by the artists who are commissioned to create their cover art.

A great number of his fans also hold dear a host of paintings he's produced for TSR, creators of the father of all Fantasy role-playing games, *Dungeon & Dragons*. Says Jon Schindehette, senior art director for TSR, Dan's style, his "look," really fits well with certain product lines at TSR. Jon should know; he works with 70-80 freelancers for the products produced by TSR. "His character development is his strongest suit," Jon told me, "but he's also a favorite because he hits deadlines, does technically superior work, and is a great guy to work with—he's got a 'can do' attitude." That kind of favoritism translates into illustrations that not only sell products for TSR, but make the games memorable for players and fans. Says Jon, echoing their tastes, "I especially liked his recent cover for a Dragonlance novel, *Raistlin and Caramon*; he did a great job in catching the essence of the characters." He adds, "But I'm also looking forward to seeing what he can do for some high-profile Dragonlance novels coming out in 2000." So fans, look out!

After years of painting creatures, Fantasy subjects, and characters for TSR, Horne is delighted to see such kinds of creatures and characters "come to life" in his three-dimensional art. How that came about is serendipity, the chance suggestion of a friend (Joe Broers) who enjoyed making small figures and said, one day around two years ago, "Hey, have you ever tried super sculpy?"

Dan's artistic life was changed forever.

He had never sculpted much before, perhaps small creature heads and such, for use as models for reference, nor had he ever paid much serious attention to this 3-D medium. Looking back now, he confesses, "I've always felt something was missing, but I didn't know what." Then came the



Painting Dan Horne the TSR look on the cover for The TSR World Builder's Guide.

DAN CONTINUES TO LEARN FROM CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS AS DIVERSE AS JACK KIRBY AND PATRICK WOODRUPPE, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, THIS ARTIST'S WORK IS REALLY HIS OWN.

day he held clay in his hands and started to mold it "for real" ... and something wonderful happened!

A 28-inch Gandalf doll, modeled after the well-known character from J.R.R. Tolkien's novel, was his first sculpture. Marvelously costumed by Horne, and eerily lifelike in mien, it was handily nominated for a Chesley Award in 1997. Then followed the "best professional artist" award at Philcon 1997 (Philadelphia Science Fiction Convention), and in 1999 he won the gold and silver medals at the Phantom Figure Show for his sculptures. And now, for the past two years, he's been designing and sculpting action figures based on Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* characters for Toy Vault's Middle Earth toy line.

Wow! Not only off and running, but well on his way, only two years after deciding to design and sculpt!

While continuing to take freelance assignments from major gaming companies such as TSR and top-drawer book publishers, Horne has started his own model kit production company called Flying Carpet Studios, to produce cast resin model kits based on his own sculptures. The first release will be *Gron the Elf Slayer*, a two-headed ogre offered in a seven-part kit that can be assembled and painted by collectors. The kit will be available via model kit magazines and on Dan's Web site.

Other exciting ventures loom: the opportunity to do some sculpting of Fantasy creatures for a film production company in Cal-

ifornia ("I'm really jazzed up about that!" says Dan), as well as some possible licensing and publishing prospects that can't yet be shared with readers, but which (take it from me) are *really* exciting! Dan is gearing up for pursuing one-of-a-kind costumed Fantasy dolls and a series of limited edition dolls, while he's also releasing this year a reproduction of *Sea of Tears*, an award-winning and beautiful mermaid painting in oils which was featured in *Spectrum 5*, the popular and respected juried anthology of imaginative art.

"Painting fulfills the mysterious and spiritual side of me," says Dan, "and sculpture fulfills the physical, earthy side: A good mix of sculpting and paintings is the best for me!" ☛

voyage

to the

In some realities this might be a fairy tale, in others a major scientific advance. You be the judge.

By Derryl Murphy Illustration by Walter Velez

moon

Standing on the pad, he let his gaze drift back up to the full Moon, ignoring the techs for the moment as they zipped and buckled and sealed him into his orange launch suit. The Moon hung low in the night sky right now, but would slowly drift into place directly overhead. He hoped the high foreheads had calculated the perigee and launch rate correctly.

"Helmet," said one of the techs. He nodded briefly, gazing for a second into his reflection in the visor, reading the backwards letters of his name badge in bold script: Armstrong. He then stood stock still as they fitted it over his head and sealed it into place. He hefted his auxiliary dephlogisticator, heard the hiss as air began to stream into his suit, then nodded at the tech when he pointed at his own throat. Yes, he could breathe fine.

From there he was helped into the launch vehicle, eased onto the couch, and plugged into the console before the door was shut, sealing him off from the outside world. Then things were silent for a few more seconds, just the hiss of air and his breathing echoing around inside his helmet.

"You read?" The tinny voice of the Mission Specialist calling jolted him out of his momentary reverie. He tried responding, but found both his throat and his lips were dry. He licked his lips then swallowed, tried again.

"Loud and clear. How long do I have?"

"We open the box in less than a minute. The site is still in shadow, but you'll only have another 30 seconds or so before it starts."

"Roger that. Just hope we can keep in touch after I launch."

"Thirty seconds. They tell us you'll be able to. I'm sure they're right."

He grunted. "Hope so."

"Get ready. Box is opening now. Water's running."

Another voice came on. "Check. Pressure acceptable."

"Clear the pad," said the Mission Specialist. "Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four. Three. Two. One. Confirmation. Target has acquired light."

He gritted his teeth, waiting for the first jolt, hoping it would only be that and not he and his vessel being crushed. But nothing came. He was about to ask what was happening when the second voice came on again.

"We have contact on all three stalks."

"Roger," came a third voice. "Automated systems working fine. The mirrors are steering them, directing the light correctly, no faults found."

"Ready the latches."

A row of gauges and blinking lights sat above his head. He reached up and cleared the board, readied three switches. "Tell me when."

"Get ready," said the Mission Specialist. "Number Two now."

He flipped the second switch. There was a scraping sound and the vehicle slid up and to the left a bit.

"Number One now."

He threw the first switch. More scraping, and this time the nose tilted up and to the right.

"Number Three now."

He threw the final switch, listened to the grinding as the vehicle bumped against the stalk and then was caught by the latch. "All green inside," he said.

"Roger that," came the reply. "Looks like three good contacts from down here. Liftoff is going fine, and velocity is increasing."

He could feel more motion now. At first the most he was getting was the sensation of being jostled and bumped back and forth. But now he was beginning to feel the acceleration, enough that he was even being pressed back into his couch.

"Five hundred meters," said the Mission Specialist.

"Roger." Checking his chronometer, he blinked in surprise. Test launches had never gone this quickly. Of course, limited resources had kept them from using more than stalk in each of the two previous tests, rather than the three for this voyage. He hoped he wouldn't overshoot.



"Thousand meters," came the voice again. It was sounding more distant and tinny. They were going to try and hook repeaters along the length of the stalks, but if they weren't successful, he could count on losing contact very soon now.

Nothing to concern himself about now. He busied himself by checking instrumentation, making sure everything was working all right. Every once in a while he looked out the small window in the hatch, watching the Moon as it grew ever larger.

"Fifteen hundred meters." The voice sounded even farther away now. "Damn it. Sorry, we weren't able to get the repeaters on. The whole load got crushed when one of the stalks coiled over." He closed his eyes, listened to his breathing to the steady rumble as he ascended higher and higher.

"Roger. Watch for me at the appointed hour, no matter."

"Affirmative." The voice scratched, broke up for a few seconds, then for a moment was overridden by voices from the Firmament, mysterious message crackling and hissing in the background: "Welcher Engel ist dies? Von welcher H he sprichtst du?" Then one last whisper from Earth. "Do us proud."

He knew he was going to be on his own this trip anyhow, with or without communication with home. More Firmamental interference was starting to slip through, so he shut off the *choralis* and turned to watch the Moon grow larger.

Soon he would be there, and no matter what happened after, he would always be known as Jack Armstrong, First Man on the Moon. Provided the beanstalk was able to get him there.

the face of the Moon now covered the entire sky. He could now see the gardens the astrologers had divined, long rows of green marching alongside the blue of a finger-shaped lake. And at the end of the lake there hovered the clouds that were there each and every day, hiding what, no one knew.

But the astrologers and the high foreheads said they knew it must be important, and that was why Jack was on this mission. Even if it was only contact with whoever tended the gardens.

It seemed now like he was upside-down, land rushing to greet him as he plummeted toward a crushing impact. But at the last minute Jack activated the forward parasol, and in the ensuing shadow the stalks twisted and twirled in their desperate search for moonlight. The vehicle did a stomach-wrenching spin and then settled down on the surface of the Moon as light as a feather.

Jack switched on the *choralis*. "The *Aquila* has landed," he said, sure they wouldn't be able to hear him, but still wanting to follow the established procedures.

The speakers responded with more Firmamental interference, a high, soft voice saying, "*Ningún angel está salvo en este lugar. ¡Ten cuidado! ¡Ten cuidado!*"

A twist of the handle and the latch popped open. It was daytime here, as opposed to night back on Earth. Jack supposed this made sense, with the face of the Moon being lit so bright with every pass it made overhead.

He unhooked himself and sat straight up, leaning over to get as good a look as he could through his helmet. He had landed on soil, dark gray dirt that looked to have the consistency of the fine chalk one of his old schoolmasters had used when summoning a demon for lessons. In the distance he could see a band of green, and beyond that what looked to be fog. Overhead sat the Earth, a broad blue and brown disk, and beyond it sat the Sun, harsh yellow peeking out from behind its (Earth-related) nighttime hiding spot along the Universal Plane.

Hefting his dephlogisticator, he swung his legs over the edge and gingerly set foot on the surface of the Moon. He felt lighter here, enough to possibly make a significant difference in his step. *Choralis* still on and still whispering scratchy nonsense, he announced: "That's a small footstep for one man; a giant reach for much of mankind." He smiled. Suitably overdone, just what the guys back on Earth would like.

The high foreheads and all of the astrologers had predicted that the

Lunar day would be longer than an Earth day, and today the full moon was due to sit visible in the sky for several hours after the Sun poked its nose over the Plane again. All this meant that Jack had extra time to explore, but not enough to waste. He had to take care of his assignment and get back down the beanstalk before it wilted away when the moonlight disappeared.

Resting his dephlogisticator on the ground beside him, Jack reached back into the *Aquila* and began pulling out supplies. A small backpack with food and medical and foraging supplies came first, followed by a small bag that held his *camera distincta* and *camera activus*. He pulled both of these from their bag and took both still and moving images of the surrounding landscape, as well as of the Earth overhead.

Checking the wristband on the outside of his suit, he found that his compass didn't work; it seemed that the high foreheads and astrologers were right and that the Moon did not have a population of tiny lode-mites to tell the hand which way to point. Jack knew that whatever was behind the fog was most likely his destination, but he would need a method to find his way back to the beanstalk when it was time to descend.

He rummaged through his supply pack for a moment, first pulling out a loaf of bread. That idea was swiftly ruled out by a memory of something that had happened to two of his mother's cousins when they were children, many years before; he wasn't sure if there were birds and rodents on the Moon, but he didn't want to chance it. He finally settled on a bag of brightlycolored clarifying beads, carried with him as trade goods in case there were primitive natives in charge of the gardens. He dropped the first bead to make sure that it would work, watched as a mirror image of himself and his surroundings rose up out of the dust, then from the corner of his eye watched it slowly sink back into the bead as he turned away.

There was only one thing left to do before he started on his way. Reaching back into the *Aquila*, he pulled from it a small glass tubule, stoppered with a cork. Inside sat a compost of moldy leaves and bits of rancid fat, collected with great care by one of the high foreheads from an abiogenesis facility in a town near the launch site.

Jack carefully slid the tubule into a special slot in his dephlogisticator and sealed it in. Removing the cork took some delicate handiwork after all this, but with the help of some tweezers sewn into the inside of the leather cover, he managed to do so. A turn of a dial increased the flow of air into the tubule, and another dial released a special mixture of alchemical components apparently guaranteed to speed the process of spontaneous generation.

With the chronometer embedded beside the useless compass in Jack's wristband, he counted out the minutes required. When time was up, he slid back the cover and pulled the tubule out of its pocket.

Sure enough, maggots swarmed through the mulch, wriggling madly as they ate their way through the disgusting mixture. Jack knelt down and poured the contents out onto the Lunar dust, watching carefully for adverse reactions from any of the pasty white grubs.

Nothing untoward happened. Indeed, some of the maggots were already covering themselves with a hard white shell, sure sign that they were preparing to give up their spot in the ladder of life to small flies.

Jack turned a third dial, listened as the hiss of incoming air slowly died away. When he could hear nothing but his own breathing, he inhaled deeply and detached his helmet from its locking mechanism. The air was cool, but temperate. A slow breath out, and then he breathed in, cautiously.

Everything was fine. The air tasted and smelled a touch rancid, but certainly no worse than his own body odors.

There was a spare microphone and earpiece in one of his pockets, so he put them on and plugged them in to the slot in the suit just under his left ear. Background noise and chatter still seemed to dominate the *choralis*, but he thought he could hear the Mission Specialist speaking, something about clouds, he thought. If so, a response was certainly in order.

"I am leaving now for the clouds. The air here is fine to breathe, and I expect to have answers shortly."

A squeal of more Firmamental interference followed this pro-

nouncement, high-pitched whine and harp music somewhat ludicrously combined, and then a distant voice, yet again, speaking vaguely familiar nonsense: "*Angel! N'y va pas! Tu ne pourrais pas survivre là-bas! Je t'cr; prie, reviens tout de suite la Strate Omniprésente.*"

Turning the receiver volume down to a less-irritating background hiss, Jack unhooked his dephlogisticator and set it inside the *Aquila*, then strapped his pack over his suit and lifted the camera bag to his shoulder. He peeled off his gloves so that he would be able to handle the clarifying beads with greater dexterity, and then set off in search of what lay behind the clouds.

The Lunar desert he and his vessel had occupied soon gave way to a plain, fields of golden grasses waving in the soft, cool breeze. The grasses were taller than Jack, but fortunately they parted often enough for him to keep an eye on the bank of white clouds that served as cover for his mysterious destination. Jack stopped and took a picture here, making sure he got it from an angle that included the Earth in the sky.

The plain was soon followed by the gardens whose existence the astrologers had predicted. He stood on the crest of a small hill and looked down on row after row after row of vegetation, all recognizable as fruits and vegetables he would know, but all enormous: salads to feed an army; no, a nation. Perhaps they grew that way for the same reason he felt less weight. Or perhaps whoever grew and ate them...

And then the clouds parted for the briefest of instances, and Jack had a glimpse of the secret that stood at the edge of the lake. It was a castle, a giant stone edifice larger than any mighty wizard or high forehead on Earth could ever hope to possess. Jack saw brief details of high, steep stairs leading to a massive, dark keep, of crenellations, turrets, and uncovered parapets, all watched over by a motley collection of weathered, disturbed, and angry-looking gargoyles. But then like a curtain being drawn back into place, Jack was no longer looking at the solid, ominous gray of old stone, but rather the unformed wispy slate of fog and cloud.

Dropping another bead, Jack continued on his way, the castle his confirmed destination.

At first he thought perhaps it was a trick of perspective, but as Jack neared the castle and the clouds slowly gave way, he could see what looked to be an old woman standing on one of the many steps and sweeping away great nimbuses of dust. The problem was not the woman, nor was it her fairly mundane task; rather, it was the fact that she seemed so much taller than she possibly could be.

As Jack neared the castle he thought he had managed to get a grip on perspective by judging the height of the stairs and size of the castle's large central door by comparing them with plants from the garden, which led all the way to almost the foot of the high stone walls. The stairs appeared to be tall and broad, enough so that he might have to pull himself up like a child new to walking, and if this was accurate, then the door was tall enough for him to walk in with a man on his shoulders, and a man on that man's shoulders.

Even with this evidence, though, it was hard to credit the size of the old woman. Crookedly stooped over the broom, she still seemed to be nearly twice Jack's height.

He would need to be careful, and so decided to stop and eat and think about his advance.

Sitting on the ground behind a bush, Jack opened his bag and pulled out his lunch. Bread, cheese, small flask of wine, and some fruit. He ate fairly quickly, but still enjoyed every bite and swallow. When he was done, he set the empty flask on the ground beside him, wrapped the leftover cheese and placed it back in the bag, then stood up, plan in place and ready to go. The direct approach seemed most sensible right now.

The old woman was still on the steps, a little closer to ground level by the time he approached the bottom stair. She noticed him when he was about 50 paces off, and stopped her sweeping to watch his advance. She was, he noticed, perhaps even taller than his first estimate.

Stopping at the bottom stair, Jack tilted his head way back and smiled up at her. "Good morning, Ma'am."

She cocked an eyebrow at him, nodded her head. "Morning." The look on her face told him nothing, except that she was likely not enthused about his presence.

"My name is Jack, Ma'am, Jack Armstrong. I have traveled some distance to come and see what lies behind these clouds." He gestured overhead. From here, nothing above could be seen through the billowing mist.

The old woman leaned forward and spit through a gap in her front teeth, warm saliva splattering onto the steps near Jack like stale dirty water from a wash bucket. "Come far, eh?"

Jack nodded.

"Better come in for some tea, then, I reckon." She turned and started up the steps, leaving the broom lying where she'd been standing. Jack followed her, scrambling up the stairs on all fours. But then she stopped suddenly, and he almost bounced off her heel. The old woman turned and glared down at him. Shook a long, crooked finger and said, "But mind you stay no longer than a cuppa. My man is out hunting for the day, and you don't want to be here when he gets back."

"Why is that, Ma'am?" asked Jack, panting a bit as he raced to keep up with her renewed ascension.

The old woman reached the landing, and swung open the huge wooden door, its hinges creaking and scraping in protest. She waved him in and then shut the door with a teeth-jarring slam behind them, answering, "Because my man is an ogre who eats boys and men for breakfast, usually broiled and on buttered toast." She leaned down until she was almost looking Jack in the eye, and hissed, "And he has a ferocious appetite!"

There was a squeal of feedback from Jack's earpiece just then, and a babble of voices all shouting at once. "*Sad je prekasno! Andjeo, ti moraš naći način da pobjegneš, ili ćeš patiti tamo za cjelu vječnost.*"

He turned the volume right off, blinking at the shock of the onslaught of noise as well as the thought of having entered the castle of an ogre; a carnivorous ogre—at that. He nodded, because the old woman seemed to be expecting some response, and when she grunted with some apparent satisfaction and continued walking, he hurried after her.

His chronometer told him he had just under five hours to go until he had to be back on *Aquila* and ready for descent. The walk was not a terribly long one, but he preferred to be sure he had an extra-large window. Even without the incentive of being cannibalized, he knew he couldn't stay long.

The passage eventually brought them to a large, warm, homey kitchen. The table was tall, enough so that he had to stand on his toes to look over the edge. The old woman pulled a chair from a corner and tapped it with a gnarled finger. "Sit here," she said. "I'll put the kettle on."

He pulled himself up onto the enormous wooden chair and watched as she muttered some words over the great wood stove. A blue flame jumped to life, and she placed a kettle full of water on top of it. Reaching into a cupboard to the right of the stove, she pulled out one cup and was about to get a second, hopefully smaller one, when they both heard the door slam, if possible even louder now than it had sounded when Jack had stood right next to it.

The floor began to shake, the chair Jack sitting in shimmying in horrible syncopation to the thumping that was increasing in volume with every second. On the table, Jack watched with horrified fascination as a vast porcelain sugar bowl jumped and fidgeted across the surface, spoon inside clinking against the edge and little white granules of sugar jumping from the bowl in a manner that reminded Jack of rats leaping from a sinking ship.

"It's my man!" hissed the old woman. "Quick! You must hide, or you're meat on the table for certain!" Jack jumped from the chair and watched her with increasing panic as she cast about for a suitable hiding place. After a few seconds of turning this way and that, she finally opened the door to the oven and gestured at it. "Inside here, you."

Jack mutely shook his head, the motion making him feel for all the

world like an intransigent child. The burner on the stove was still lit, and all this talk of being eaten didn't endear him to hiding in there. He quickly looked around the kitchen before pointing to the breadbox, a blue and yellow thing that looked large enough for him to be fairly comfortable. "In there," he said.

She nodded and lifted him up to the countertop, and he scrambled into the box and sat on his rear, knees drawn up close to his chin and backpack resting against the rear of the breadbox. Beside him lay a few slices of heavy rye bread, flat and dark and pungent. Hopefully the ogre would have no desire for a sandwich.

The lid to the box did not close completely, and by leaning forward just a bit and turning his head one way or the other, Jack could see most of the kitchen. He watched the old woman as she poured the now-hot water into a teapot and then turn to greet her husband the ogre.

He came marching down stairs that came from the back way, feet stamping so hard that everything in the kitchen not bolted down was hopping or shaking. His entrance was even louder, a great flurry of grunts and bellows and snorts, followed by his flinging a huge canvas bag, an axe, and a spear into a corner of the room. The bag, Jack noticed, had a dark, blackish-red stain slowly growing along one side and the bottom.

Tearing his eyes away from that grisly sight, Jack turned his attention back to the ogre. He was taller than his wife by a good meter or more, and wore a floppy cap that appeared to have been stitched from the skin of dead humans. The ogre's clothes seemed relatively benign otherwise, but his features were certainly anything but. His face was fierce and scowling, pockmarked with scabs and boils and furrowed with wrinkles and lines so that his whole visage appeared to be a series of monstrous red and yellow hills and brown and black chasms, interrupted only by a snarling mouth full of sharp, yellow teeth surrounded by thin, cracked pink lips; a flat pug nose with wide, dark nostrils; and rheumy eyes that looked like they might shine like red-hot coals in a dark room.

"You're back early, dear," said the old woman. "Good luck hunting today?" She took a sip of her tea.

The ogre nodded, leering, perhaps at some misshapen memory of death and dismemberment, thought Jack. "Aye," he said. "Caught three heifers while they was watering down." He paused, sniffed at the air. "Wife, I smell something. Something here in this kitchen!" He broke into a broad, fierce grin, then bellowed out a poem in a voice so loud Jack thought his ears would bleed.

"Fee-fi-fo-faut!

I smell the blood of a Lunanaut!

Be he alive or be he dead,

I'll grind his bones to make my bread!"

At this, Jack, who was leaning one hand on a slice of bread while he watched, quickly pulled his hand away. The ogre in the meantime began to tear about the kitchen, pulling out jars and looking behind anything that he felt could be a hiding place. His wife rushed after him, setting her teacup down on the table so that she could take his hands in hers.

"The only thing you smell, my dear, is scraps from the young boy you ate for supper last night. I took what was left and rendered the flesh and boiled the remaining bones so that you could have a nice soup with your meal later today." She led him to the stove and opened the lid to a pot on the back, dipping in a ladle and pulling out a spoonful for him to check.

The ogre sniffed at the soup, then tasted it and nodded. "Mmph," he grunted. "That's excellent. Nicely captures the flavor of youth, don't you think?"

The old woman nodded. "I thought you'd like it, my love. Why don't you sit down and I'll get you a bowl-full, perhaps a nice mug of warm ale as well?"

Her husband shuffled over to the table and sat at the chair Jack had occupied only a few moments before. He sniffed the air again and then scratched his head. "Sure smells fresh," he said, but she put a bowl and mug in front of him, and he promptly dug in, eating and drinking everything in what seemed to be only seconds.

When he was done, he leaned back and patted his belly, then called out to the old woman; "Wife! Fetch me my golden harp!"

"Yes, dear," said the old woman, and disappeared from Jack's field of view for a few seconds. She came back and set a plain wooden chest down on the table in front of her husband, then kissed him on the cheek. "I'll be out back hanging the wash if you need me," she said, glancing briefly at the breadbox.

"Aye," said the ogre. Jack watched the creature wait until his wife left the kitchen, then pull a key from a leather pouch dangling from his belt. He used the key to open a brass padlock, and then opened the chest and reached in.

The harp was indeed golden, adorned in a fashion Jack had never seen before. Its strings shone with a luminosity unmatched by anything in Jack's experience, and carvings and ornamentations marched along its exterior, each image and relief a separate and stunning work of art.

but the most amazing carving was that of a person, or rather, thought Jack, something like but not quite a person. It stood majestically at the tall end of the harp, an image of a beautiful naked woman with long golden tresses, gold spun so fine it looked superior to real hair. It faced out, away from the strings, but three pairs of arms faced backwards, carved in place to look like they were there to pluck the strings.

The carved woman was completed by a pair of wings that looked like they could reach high above the harp, although the ogre for some reason had them pinned together in two places with bulky wooden clips. The gold on the wings was so fine that Jack could see shimmering images beyond them, translucence like a distant mirage.

"Sing, harp!" barked the ogre.

With that cue, the harp's arms moved, began to pluck the strings. Jack blinked in surprise, and then his jaw dropped when the carved woman opened her mouth and started to sing. The melody was gorgeous, the most beautiful thing Jack thought he had ever heard.

Even though Jack was sure he had turned the receiver, a torrent of voices from the *choralis* tore into his ear as the harp hit an especially powerful note. Finally, one voice broke in above the others, clearer now because Jack was holding his hand over his ear to hopefully keep the ogre from hearing the sounds and coming to investigate. "That voice! It must be her! You whose name is Jack, you must do everything you can to save her!"

Jack sat bolt upright at this, almost banging his head against the top of the box. He hadn't understood anything said before now, and had certainly never heard his name before. The harp was loud enough that he felt safe in whispering, and so he said, "Who are you? And what do you mean?"

"We tried to warn you, but could not find the right tongue in time. But now that you are there, you must help. It is the right thing to do." By now the voice was fading. "Just save her," it whispered, and then there was background hiss before the volume tapered off again.

The harp sang for a long time, perhaps two hours or more, although Jack had not thought to check the chronometer when he had first hidden himself. So he sat and waited, frustrated with being stuck in this position, but ecstatic at having a chance to listen. He never understood any of the words the harp sang, but he connected with the emotion; it sang of lost hope, music always seeming ready to soar away into the stratosphere before crashing back with agonizing constriction.

But the ogre appeared unaffected by the music, seemingly enjoying the melodies but not paying attention to the underlying passion. And slowly, Jack watched as the ogre first leaned back in his chair, then leaned forward again, resting his head in his hands, before finally slumping down, asleep. The harp kept playing, albeit quieter than before.

Jack waited for a few minutes, but the sleeping creature did not stir. He opened the lid to the breadbox and tentatively stepped out onto the counter. The harp turned her head and looked at him, surprise showing on her face and voice catching for a brief second, but then she nodded and kept singing.

He quietly pulled the *camera activus* from his bag and took some images of the kitchen, the harp, and the sleeping ogre, zooming in tight so that the high foreheads back home could see the hideous face and know why he hadn't made any serious contact. Then he put the camera away and jumped as lightly as possible to the floor and walked quietly to the table.

Standing on his toes he found he could just reach the base of the harp where her feet were located. He grabbed it and pulled it over to the edge, looked up, and was greeted with the warmest, most melting smile he had ever witnessed in his life.

The top four hands still playing music, the bottom pair reached out for his own, making it easier for Jack to get her down to the floor. The harp was heavy, although not too bad in the light gravity, and so he managed it all right, only one minor chord being struck in the process, sounding a touch dissonant alongside the music accompanying this rescue.

"I'm Jack," he whispered when she was standing beside him. "I guess I'm here to save you." He glanced up at the ogre, but by now the monstrous being was snoring in fits and starts.

The harp stopped playing with a cadenza followed by two simple chords, still smiling. "You'll have to carry me outside," she said, "and unpin my wings there. I cannot fly in here, and my wings would only get in the way."

Jack nodded, then bent down and slid his arm around her waist. The harp was a little harder to carry from this angle, awkward enough that he half-dragged her as well. But he managed to stagger his way to the front door without dropping her, but then stopped and gently let her down when they reached the door.

The old woman had slammed it shut, and the handle was high above Jack's head. He stood on his toes, but it was still beyond his reach.

"Bring me to the door," said the harp. "I can lift you up."

Jack slid the harp over to beside the door, then stepped into her cupped hands. Leaning over a bit, he managed to grab hold of the handle. The door was impossibly heavy, but with a straining grunt he was able to pull it open a bit more than a crack. He jumped back to the floor and leaned into it then, pushing and heaving until it was open wide enough to let the two of them out.

There was a roar then, a great shout from deep in the bowels of the castle. "Who has stolen my harp?" This was followed by a crash, and then everything started to shake again.

The ogre was awake and running toward the door.

Jack grabbed the harp and pulled her out onto the top step. "Unpin me!" she cried, tilting her golden wings down until Jack could reach the clips.

He grabbed the first clip, wrestled it off as quickly as he could, at the same time fearful that he would tear something. All the time the raging ogre was coming closer, and by the time he got the second clip undone loose stone was dropping from high up on the castle walls.

The harp spread her wings with a rapturous cry, then leaned over and gave Jack a hurried kiss. "Thank you," she whispered, and then with a flurry of wings and a great rush of air she soared high into the sky.

Jack took only a second to watch her fly up, and then he was running pell-mell down the stairs, jarring his knees with each oversized step. He had reached the bottom and was running into the garden when the ogre burst through the door, yelling, "Come back, you vermin! I'll have your flesh for supper and your bones for my bread, I will!"

Now Jack felt the true advantages of being lighter than he was on Earth. Heart pounding and bowels beginning to constrict with fear, he ran with great leaps and bounds, covering incomprehensible distances in amazing time. But all the time the ogre was after him, the ground shaking in his wake and the air reverberating with his clamor and bellowing.

Every so often as he ran a clarifying bead would come into his line of sight, and a startled image of himself running like a frightened gazelle would pop up for a brief second before disappearing

from view again. The third time he saw an image of himself he also caught a glimpse of the ogre far in the background, standing still and swinging wildly at something. He stopped for a brief second to look, and realized the ogre must have unwittingly spied a clarifying bead and was busy trying to fight his own image.

This spurred him on even more, and soon he was back at the *Aquila*. He quickly threw his gear into its compartment, then pulled out the dephlogisticator and plugged it back into his suit, turned it on, and then fitted his helmet into place.

He was just climbing in when he heard another roar, and saw the ogre bounding up the hill toward him, dagger as big as the largest human sword in his hand. Jack sealed the cockpit, then turned on the magnets. The high foreheads had told him that if he needed to descend ahead of schedule, the magnets would hopefully pull the *Aquila* and the beanstalk toward the lode-mites back on Earth.

With a groan, the beanstalk started to twist and shudder and the *Aquila* started to rise. The vessel was soon speeding back up toward the Earth, but it was shaking horribly at the same time. Jack peered out the side window that faced the Moon and saw that the ogre had managed to leap up and grab hold of the beanstalk and was climbing toward him.

Jack turned up the choralis again. "Mission Control, we have a problem. *Aquila* is being pursued by a hostile creature. I may not make it back. Please respond, over."

There was a squealing, and Jack thought he could hear the Mission Specialist whispering in the background. But then another voice came on, saying, "Détacher! Non ... Detach yourself from the legume. We will bear you back to your home and take care of the beast."

"Who are you?" asked Jack.

"Look to the front of your craft," came the reply.

Outside there hovered the harp with several other winged beings, all of different shapes and colors, all beautiful beyond belief, flapping their wings with slow, easy movements. She smiled at him and nodded, and so Jack flipped all three switches, releasing the latches from their grips on the beanstalk. There was a brief lurch as the craft jumped away and toward the Earth, and then he could see that it was being held up by the winged beings on all sides.

They spiraled down toward the Earth, and soon the launch center and the landing pad came into stark relief. He could see the base of the beanstalk, and saw that several people and even two of the winged beings were hard at work chopping at the base of the stalk with large axes. As he was brought down for a feather-light landing two axes sliced into the last bit of plant, and then the stalk was straining over to one side with a creaking groan that put to mind giant teeth grinding together, loud enough so Jack could hear it through the closed hatch and his suit.

Two techs ran and let him out, then hurried him off to the side. His helmet was removed, and then they all stood in awe and watched as bits of the beanstalk fell to Earth, accompanied by what looked to be a flaming comet that roared and cured angrily the entire way down until it crashed to the ground several hundred meters away. The earth shook with the impact, gulls wheeling into the air and screaming madly, bats pouring from the mouth of some uncharted sinkhole and whirling through the daytime sky with precision confusion, and dust and moisture ventured into the air, forming new clouds before delivering wet, blackened soot in large splotches on the pavement and on their heads.

The ogre was dead.

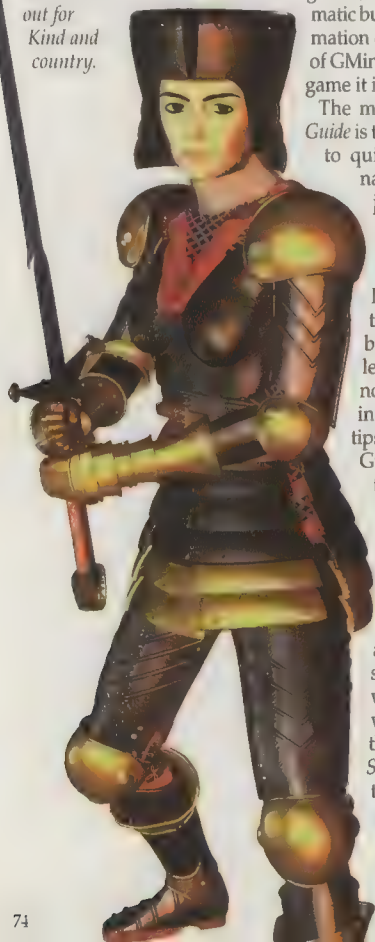
He tilted his head back with the awed techs and watched as the winged beings—he knew now to be angels—ascended into the skies, going back home to their place in the Universal Plane. Melodious music reached down to stroke his ears, this time an orchestra and chorus that were joyous and soaring and free, telling tales of release and ecstasy that did his heart glad.

Jack smiled, and then walked back to the *Aquila* to retrieve his gear. 🍀

BY ERIC T. BAKER

From Game Master etiquette to Furry Pirates—there's an RPG out there for you.

This warrior princess (below) will be yours to command in Majesty. At right, she and her compatriots fight their hearts out for Kind and country.



ANYTHING WORTH DOING IS WORTH DOING WELL. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF GAME Mastering a role-playing game. Playing an RPG has been properly likened to improvisational radio theater, but it is the GM who acts as the director. If he can't get the most out of the premise of the game and out of the players playing it, then everyone's enjoyment suffers. The GM's job is even harder if he is trying to run a game with a background that is new to his players, such as the *Emerald Empire of Rokugan*. All that said, if you are currently a Game Master of a *Legend of the Five Rings* campaign, or if you are thinking about becoming one, then it is worth your money to invest in the *Legend of the Five Rings GM's Survival Guide* (by Jim Pinto. Alderac Entertainment Group, Ontario, CA, 1999 160 pgs., \$23.95). If you only have in mind a one-shot trip to Rokugan, then obviously don't bother. If you don't game in the Emerald Empire at all, but you do GM other games, then the *Survival Guide* is not an automatic buy, but does contain some good information on the theory and practice of the art of GMing that will be useful no matter what game it is employed in.

The most obvious value of the *Survival Guide* is the tables and charts that allow a GM to quickly populate a Rokugan village, name and stat nonplayer characters, judge the glory involved in a given act, find what supplement a particular skill was published in, and so on. The strength of paper and dice RPGs is that they can go anywhere the GM and the players can imagine, but following those imaginings often leads the GM far from his prepared notes. The *Survival Guide* puts crucial information right at the GM's finger tips. The second value of the *Survival Guide* is in giving the GM information that allows him to bring the Emerald Empire to life as a setting distinct from our Western expectations. Obviously, every *LotFR* book, from the core rules on, has sought to do this. The Intrigue line of scenarios, for instance, depends on the characters thinking and acting like real samurai of the Emerald Empire would. This is easier said than done, which is why it doesn't hurt to walk the ground again. The results in the *Survival Guide* are uneven. The section on Etiquette gives a long example of how to make the game interesting for two players of different skills. One is an experienced player running a character with skills

unsuited to a court function and the other is a novice player with skills perfectly suited to the court function. While the example does give some good advice for handling this situation, it is undercut by the fact that neither of the characters ever fails a skill roll, despite the disparity in their scores. Watching a GM handle a player who is making all the right moves but can't make the skill rolls to pull them off would have been more instructive.



For GMs running a long-term *LotFR* campaign, all the information and charts in the *Survival Guide* are more than worth the money. Those interested in writings on the art of playing and game mastering role-playing games will be annoyed at how often Jim Pinto's advice is the equivalent of a flight instructor telling a young pilot to catch a tail wind. Absolutely. Everyone is in favor of tail winds and good role-playing; the trick is to catch one and to produce the other. For those who are not hard-core Rokugan GMs, the book would have been better if there had been less emphasis on what to seek in game play, and more on how to actually achieve it.

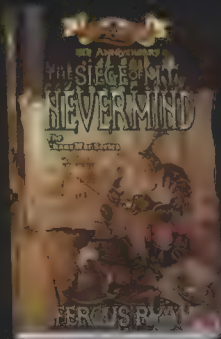
GURPS: Discworld by Terry Pratchett and Phil Masters. Steve Jackson Games, Austin, TX, 1999, 240 pgs. \$25.95

It is too bad there isn't a gaming magazine to "out" role-players the way the *Advocate* "outs" gays. Writers like Walter John Williams and Raymond E. Feist would

When gnomes do something right, EVERYTHING GOES WRONG.

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be among the first "class." Eventually they would get around to Terry Pratchett, whose early role-playing imaginings were later transformed into the worldwide phenomenon that is the *Discworld* books. Now Steve Jackson Games has taken *Discworld* back to its role-playing roots with the hardcover edition of *GURPS: Discworld*.

GURPS: Discworld is almost a stand-alone game. It contains both the *Discworld* source material and a 32-page, revised version of *GURPS Lite*. *GURPS Lite* consists of all the basic rules you need to use the *GURPS* system. Combined with the information in the front of this book, you could run a whole campaign without buying any other *GURPS* product. On the whole, though, you would be better served having at least the core *GURPS* rulebook.

What has made *Discworld* such a success is the fact that it is funny. It is a humorous world filled with humorous characters getting into humorous situations. Each novel is like a season of *Friends* and the *GURPS* version carries that model as well. From the beginning, Phil Masters tries to impress on readers that for the humor to work in their campaigns, the characters must be like those in the books or in *Friends* for that matter. Within the assumptions of the world, the characters have to be sane, consistent, and balanced. A book, sitcom, or RPG becomes very boring very quickly if it consist of nothing but characters sitting around baying at the moon and sniffing each other's crotches.

All the favorite characters from the novels are in the supplement, most of them statted

up for GMs who choose to introduce them in adventures. There is Death himself, plus Death of Rats, Granny Weatherwas, the Patrician, Captain Vimes, Ricewind (with the luggage), Cohen the Barbarian, and many more. There are write-ups for various key

locations, lots of advice for running adventures on the *Disc*, magic schools and spells specific to the *Disc*, and two sample adventures for getting a campaign going.

The best part of *GURPS: Discworld* is simply humor and care for entertainment with which it was written. Its style is a good pastiche of Pratchett's own, including the footnotes. It is one of the few RPG supplements that is actually a pleasure to read as well as to play. Mix in some good

art by Paul Kirby and you have a book that you can hold up with pride when some nosey reporter pulls you out of the closet and outs you as a role-player.

Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Tomes:

Axe of the Dwarvish Lords by Skip Williams. TSR, Inc., Renton, WA, 1999, 192 pgs., \$26.95

Some geniuses are lucky enough to be discovered by the world at large and have their products sell in the millions. Others are not so lucky, and labor on in the obscurity of the role-playing field, producing their pieces of art for the meager wages of a game writer. Still, lack of fame and fortune doesn't make them any less brilliant.

Skip Williams fits this description. With *Axe of the Dwarvish Lords*, he has, in 192 pages plus a full-color, fol-out map, managed to create an adventure for seven characters at levels between 13 and 15 where the main villains, the creatures that will seek to thwart the characters at every turn, are, in fact, goblins. Not orcs, not hobgoblins, not ogres, not hill giants, just the poor little one-hit dice creatures that everyone remembers almost fondly from their days as a first-level fighter in their first *D&D* campaign. This should be basically impossible; by the 15 level, fighters are killing three or four goblins a round, and whether the spell casters are killing pairs or dozens a round is merely dependent on what spells they took the time to learn that morning. So what chance do the goblins have? Well, thousands.

Like the proverb says, "Crunch all you want. We'll make more."

As can be guessed from the title, this is not an adventure that can be won by simply hacking all the goblins to pieces. In keeping with tradition, they are not only numerous, but they are being led by a powerful magic-user who has gotten them organized in ways that can make units of even single-hit die creatures dangerous to magic-dripping, relic-encrusted adventurers. And yes, there is a great, abandoned, underground Dwarven city to be explored, and a great ghastly horror from the planes beyond to be defeated. In short, Skip has taken all the tropes that I remember from my days playing first-, second-, and third-level characters and combined them into an exciting new adventure for vastly more experienced characters.

Furry Pirates: Swashbuckling Adventures in the Furry Age of Piracy by Lisa Breakey and Bruce Thomas. Atlas Games, Roseville, MN 1999, 192 pgs., \$26.95

Furry is a lot like opera. Either you have a



RIGHT: Time to buckle your swash in *Discworld*. MIDDLE: Guess which game this is from! OPPOSITE: Perhaps your princess will battle this dragon in *Majesty*.



taste for it, or you don't. Like opera, if you have taste for furry, anthropomorphic animals, you likely have a passion for them. And if you have a passion for furry creatures in costumes, then *Furry Pirates* probably sounds like a terrific idea to you. I confess that it does to me.

The game world of *Furry Pirates* is set on a parallel world where sapient beings with opposable thumbs evolved from a wide variety of species, not just primates. This more diverse evolution is helped by the fact that magic is alive and well in the *FP* world. The history of this parallel world closely follows that of our Earth. The setting is the late 1600s and early 1700s, the golden age of piracy both in our world and the *FP* one. While political boundaries and names are all familiar (Louis the XIV rules in France, for instance), the normal national and political conflicts are complicated by species



Discworld, it should be pointed out that despite *Furry's* roots in Disney and Warner Brother's cartoons, *Furry Pirates* does not play the setting for laughs. Not that there can't be humor in any role-playing game, but *FP* isn't a 'toon. If you can't imagine taking seriously a game where you play a 6-foot tall, talking, walking, smoking raccoon, then *FP* is probably not your game. If, however, playing a "seadog" who spends his shore leave in a "cat house" makes perfect sense to you, then go get a copy of *Furry Pirates*.


Majesty: Sovereign of Ardanian designed by Jim Dubois for Cyberlore Studios, 1999, for Win 95/98

Are you tired of your characters getting punched in the face whenever you play a computer role-playing game? It happens constantly. Nearly every CRPG on the market puts a character that stands in for you somewhere on the board, and that character is always getting involved in one sort of scrape or another. How badly these scrapes hurt your character is almost always shown in a picture of his face. In many games, your character spends half his time walking around looking like a narc who got caught at a biker rally.

Well, if you like the idea of commanding a kingdom, but you are tired having to be constantly on the front lines of every little skirmish, then you should have a look at *Majesty* from Cyberlore studios. In *Majesty* you play the king, but all of your tasks are strategic; the heroes that inhabit the kingdom do the dirty work. How you lay out your kingdom, when and where you erect various structures dictates the sort of heroes you get. These heroes are never under your direct control, but you can influence them by offering rewards for the completion of various tasks. The choices are like those of a real-world ruler. You can't see to every task yourself, so you try to find someone competent and send him to do what needs be done. Select the right subordinates, send them on the right missions, and the kingdom grows, the citizens become more prosperous, tax revenues increase, and you become rich.

Magic does allow your character to directly influence some of the heroes' actions, for examples, casting teleport spells in order to force a hero to a particular location. The problem is that magic is much more expensive for your character to cast than it is for a hero wizard. Micromanaging can leave you penniless.

Graphically, *Majesty* has 800x600 resolution in 16-bit color. Not as good as the high-end, first-person shooters, but competitive in the CRPG market. The view is three-quarters, top down like a real-time strategy game. The character animation is fine and the art is very good.

If you are ready to take a step back and manage by delegation, with all the frustrations and rewards that brings, then give *Majesty* a try. 

conflicts as well. (The Bourbon Louis is a Lion, while Cotton Mathers, a politically powerful Massachusetts preacher who helps preside over the witch trials, is a rabbit.) Europe's troubles with the Ottoman Empire have as much to do with its rulers being Reptiles as they do with their being heathens. Designers Lisa Breakey and Bruce Thomas score points for giving their game a global stage, not restricting play to the fashionably piratical Caribbean.

Since the name of the game is *Furry Pirates*, players have more choice in the species of their character than they do in what profession the character will follow. They can pick from Avian, Canine, Chiropteran (bats), Feline, Lapine (rabbits), Marsupial, Mustelidae (minks and weasels), Prosimian (marmosets and lemurs), Reptile, Rodent, Ungulate (hoofed mammals, from gazelles to elephants), and Ursoid (bears). Professions (for the party as a whole if not the individual) are limited in the rules to pirates, privateers, blockade runners, smugglers, and pirate hunters. Species helps determine a character's relationship to life, while profession helps determine the character's manner of living.

The actual mechanics of the *Furry Pirates* provided by "The Halogen System," which is a generic system of the creators' devising. It is uncomplicated and easy to use, but not ground-braking in its mechanics. Rules have been added to it for sailing and ship-to-ship combat, which are about the same. There are enough details to run a full-fledged simulation if that is the way your tastes run, or you can simply roll dice. The ships' listings, with drawings, are both inclusive (ships make it in from all over the world) and excellent. There is an introductory scenario in the back, a must for a game like this that is so similar and so different from what the players are used to. Since I talked about the humor in

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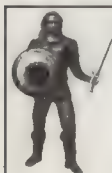
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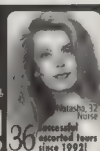
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In earlier versions of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale, we might wonder what this prince in Peter Newell's painting is about to do.

panoramic stories. In his recent novel *Enchantment*, Orson Scott Card combines a Russian variant of *Sleeping Beauty* with an adventurous time-travel plot—cracking open the narrow world of the tale, populating it with a large cast, and giving it both historical and contemporary settings. In Card's novel, an American graduate student is transported back to the 9th century, where he awakens the *Sleeping Beauty*, Katerina, who lies hidden in a forest. Katerina's kingdom is threatened by none other than Baba Yaga—an even more formidable foe than the ogress mother, capable of crossing time and hijacking a 747 in her pursuit of Card's heroes. Sheri S. Tepper draws upon the *Sleeping Beauty* tale in her science fiction novel *Beauty*. Like Card, she has opened the confines of the tale into a broader adventure. With her creative pow-

ers linked to an older fairy world, Tepper's *Beauty* is thrust forward in time (at the moment she falls asleep) into a battle between light and dark to salvage what is left of the Earth. Once again *Beauty* is the divine bride, infusing a devastated world with the promise of her creative power. Jane Yolen has created one of the most effective retellings of *Sleeping Beauty* in recent years in *Briar Rose*, a slim novel told in deceptively simple language reminiscent of old folk tales. Despite the homespun flavor of the prose, this is a brutally modern story, weaving the fairy tale into the history of a Jewish family during the horrors of World War II. (It was published as part of the "Adult Fairy Tales" series of novels edited by Terri.) Ursula K. Le Guin's rendition of the tale is a short story titled "The Poacher" (published in *Xanadu Vol. 1* and in *The Year's*

Best Fantasy & Horror, Vol. VII—a haunting piece about a simple man (a mushroom hunter) who finds his way through the thorn hedge. For other adult renditions of the tale by Karen Joy Fowler, Pat York, Kathe Koja, Patricia Wrede, Sten Westgard, Tanith Lee, and others, seek out the five volumes of the *Snow White, Blood Red* anthology series (Datlow & Windling, eds.) and *The Armless Maiden* (Windling, ed.). On the mainstream shelves, in addition to *Briar Rose* by Robert Coover, Terri recommends *Sleeping Beauties* by Susanna Moore, which she describes as an evocative contemporary novel mixing *Sleeping Beauty* imagery with Hawaiian lore. And we both recommend *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*, a brilliant collection of adult fairy tales by the Irish writer Emma Donoghue.

As the WisCon panel drew to a close, we found ourselves somewhat wistful having to let go of *Sleeping Beauty*. In our discussions and in our collective research we had found something very appealing about this enigmatic figure, seemingly passive yet surrounded by "thorns sharp as knives," danger and death. In the oldest versions we had rediscovered some of *Beauty's* original wit and strength. Even as each successive generation tried to tame or alter the substance of her nature, *Beauty's* power as an agent of transformation continued to shine forth from the core of her tale. Contemporary storytellers are still bewitched by the promise of her creative potential, and I believe that *Sleeping Beauty* will find a new voice in the coming generations that may express something of the older vitality of her character.

When I returned home after WisCon my thoughts were still full of the images of *Sleeping Beauty*. I passed my teenage daughter's room, a veritable bower of candles, clipped photographs of potential princes, a basketball, a violin resting in its open case. It was morning and she was still sleeping, buried beneath her covers, only her dark hair visible on the pillows. I smiled when I saw a sign she had purchased and placed on her doorknob: "If Prince Charming calls, wake *Sleeping Beauty*." ❖

Midori Snyder is the author of several popular fantasy novels: Soul-string, New Moon, Sadar's Keep, Belden's Fire, The Flight of Michael McBride, and (for children) The Hatchling. Her most recent novel, The Innamorati, was inspired by the myths and legends of Italy, and was written during the year the author and her family lived in Milan. She has also published short stories in numerous venues including The Year's Best Fantasy & Horror, the "Borderland" series, the "Snow White, Blood Red" series, The Armless Maiden, and Pulpouse. Midori, her husband and two children currently live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. You can learn more about her work, and find previous Folkroots columns, on the Endicott Studio Web site: www.endicott-studio.com

MOVIES

Continued from page 24

ships built for the film. McTiernan had assumed that they'd use existing boats and put a scenery arrangement around them. However, he discovered that the most practical solution was to build the ships the way they were built a thousand years ago.

Dowd says, "We eventually built a 95-foot ocean-going vessel; a 95-foot river boat, which had a much smaller draw in terms of where the boat could operate; as well as a 65-foot smaller boat. They were all built to scale in terms of the ships of that period and with 18 oars on each side. We had a champagne-bottle launch for them when they went into the water, and it was quite an impressive sight to see."

Construction coordinator Doug Hardwick describes his participation in the shipbuilding. "I have never built anything in the way of scenery that came close to what it felt like to be on those ships. It was a delight. We built them to the specifications from a thousand years ago, and so we really had recreated a piece of technology, because all a boat really is, is a shape. They had the same shape and the same weight and they handled beautifully. It was hard at first to convince some people that they were stable. But my philosophy was, if the Norsemen sailed them across the Atlantic, they had to have had a pretty good design to begin with."

Everyone involved with the making of *The 13th Warrior* talks consistently of the epic nature of the film and the care that was taken to make it look as believable as possible. Director of photography Peter Menzies, Jr. (*Hard Rain* and *A Time To Kill*) worked with McTiernan to capture the excitement and scope of the film. Due to its nature as a historical piece, they decided to use firelight whenever possible as the principal source of light. To accomplish this goal, they combined the use of fire and torch light with technology.

"Since we wanted to use torches for the night shooting, we also had to play with the technology of modern filmmaking, using high-speed films, flashing the negative, forcing the processing," Menzies Jr. says. "I'm very proud of this work, because nobody can believe that we really just used fires and torches to light scenes in our big Hollywood film. It certainly had some risks, but we were all pretty happy in the end."

There seems to be plenty for these filmmakers to be happy about.

One word of advice, though, before you settle too comfortably into your movie theater seat, before the opening credits for *The 13th Warrior* begin to roll. Advice from the Norse warriors: The deeper you go in the forest, the more things there are to eat your horse. ❖

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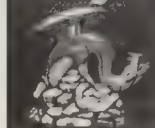
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BOOKS

Continued from page 16

many short-short stories in the past that haven't done much for me; they've felt rushed and only partially realized, or so narrow in focus that I didn't much care. But Maclay's stories are beautifully told and complete, and they deal with dark corners of life and isolated, alienated people that I care about.

The collection opens with "Late Last Night," a fascinating, nearly stream-of-consciousness tale of a college drop-out whose inability to make the "tiny accommodations" necessary to get along in college sent him out on the road seeking the real world. Yet this real world is a dark place, made up of those who don't really belong, drifting from job to job and town to town, riding buses through the night. It is a narrow life of roads and motel rooms and strangers, a life where constant movement is required to maintain sanity. Maclay's narrative voice is hypnotic as he reveals that, though the nameless main character may not realize it, his life has contracted to a very limited, repetitive series of actions. While he may have found the real world, and real people, it is a world left behind by most, a world of discarded people and places and little hope.

In "Urge to Kill," a man is rejected by his wife, his son, and his boss. He resolves to make the world a better place by killing the people who make life miserable for so many others, the small sinners who humiliate, who ignore, who play games. What he finds, and what we find, as we follow his observations, is that the world is filled with small sinners. Recognizing ourselves in those people is a startling and discomfiting experience. And how is the world ever to be a better place when it is filled with such creatures?

"Don't Go in There" centers on that frustrating horror movie convention of having characters often do the stupidest things. When they know a killer is in the house and they hear a noise in the basement, they go into the basement. Or after ample proof that their house is haunted, they stay instead of moving away. Why don't they just leave? Examining the implications of "just leaving" results in an amazingly affecting story. The first-person narrator, an average guy with a wife and three kids, has never been scared by horror movies, since the characters in them act so silly. Obviously the best course of action for these characters would be to leave. As the narrator is beset by real-world horrors—a house with structural problems, the death of one child, his wife getting pregnant by another man—he takes the sensible course, always leaving rather than staying around for things to

get worse. He leaves two houses, and finally the wife and kids. What he finds, ultimately, is that he has no life left. We can't "just leave" because we are in life and with life comes horror. No matter where we go, we can't escape it.

Maclay is a publisher as well as a writer, and he has published this collection himself, yet this shouldn't be considered some vanity publication. Eighteen of the 19 stories in this collection were previously published in anthologies and magazines, and three received honorable mention in *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*. Maclay truly is one of our premiere writers of short dark fiction, and if you like exploring the dark side of life, you'll find Maclay's short pieces unique, insightful, and unforgettable.

Jeanne Cavelos

The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Fantasy, edited by David Pringle; Overlook Press; Woodstock, NY; 256 pgs; Hardback; \$29.95

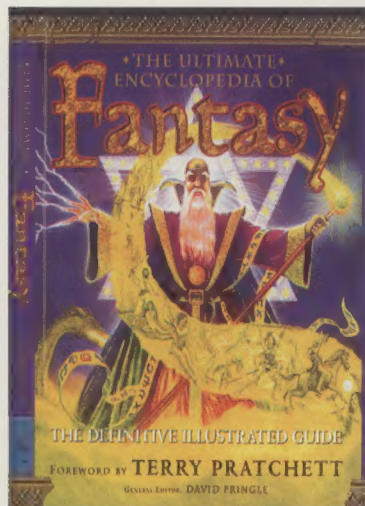
Editor David Pringle opens his richly illustrated encyclopedia with the statement, "Fantasy is the fiction of the heart's desire." Most fans of Fantasy would agree. We long for a wondrous realm of times long past when things (we believe) were simpler, stranger, and magical. Our hearts desire heroes and heroines capable of wielding glowing arcane etched swords or crystal ball-stopped staves, just as we desire danger in the form of dragons or love in the form of beautiful maidens with mahogany-colored hair and green eyes. Since the dawn of mankind, artists and storytellers have lovingly created stories and images to fulfill our hearts' deepest wishes. David Pringle has now given us 256 colorful pages recalling the finest in Fantasy's long history.

The entries in this book are not easily cross-referenced and catalogued as in a standard encyclopedia, and they do not delve deeply into the core of each subject, but I don't believe this was its purpose even though its title, *Ultimate Encyclopedia*, may make that demand of it. This text is more inclined to whet your appetite for all things fantastic, skimming across the surface, never spending too much time on any one subject, eschewing the dry and scholarly in favor of Fantasy's fun side. (How could they have done anything else and still have managed to find space for their myriad wonderful illustrations of old and new films, books, and your favorite authors?)

Terry Pratchett's splendid Foreword invites the readers inside Thunderstorm Cave, where he gives us the short version of how *homo sapiens* became *homo narrans* a la the "Storytelling Man." Pringle then launches the book back in time, giving an overview of the history of Fantasy, chronicling the artform down from myth and legends and epics through present-day

styles and forms. Granted, the history of Fantasy could fill volumes, but much like the rest of the text, this introduction offers a concise and fast-paced rundown of storytelling since the days man first decided to Make Things Up And Tell Them To Other People (while hoping for some form of payment, whether it be a piece of meat or a royalty check).

The *Encyclopedia* covers all of the various categories and subcategories growing out of the genre we love. The chapter devoted to the various types and themes runs the gamut from Fairy Tales to Arthuriana, from Lost-Race to Arabian Nights Tales. Following are two sections covering Fantastic film and television. Flip through these pages and you'll be teleported to 1924 with Douglas Fairbanks's *The Thief of Baghdad* and then back to the yesterday of today as Lucy Lawless flexes her warrior charms as *Xena: Warrior*

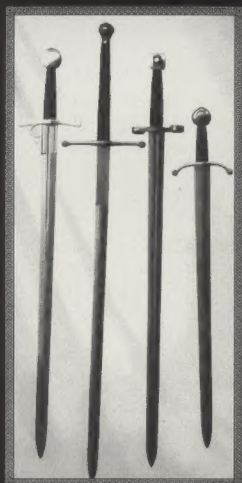


Princess. Both the Fantasy character chapter and the author biographies sections give an A-Z rundown of who's who within Fantasy fiction as well as within the Fantasy community. The gaming section brings back memories of the early '70s with Gary Gygax's *Dungeons & Dragons*, but also has detailed entries regarding miniature, card, and computer gaming.

Finally we come to Fantasy Magazines. This brief but interesting four-page section traverses the brilliant though often rocky road of fiction magazine publishing of the past hundred years. If you check out of page 247, you'll discover that a certain magazine (we won't say which one but, ahem, you're holding it right now) is being touted as "the current U.S. leader among magazines publishing fantasy fiction." But don't worry—we'd recommend that you track down this volume even without those words of praise.

Brian Murphy

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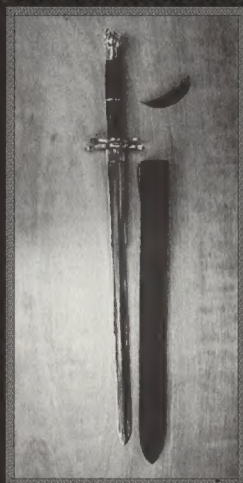
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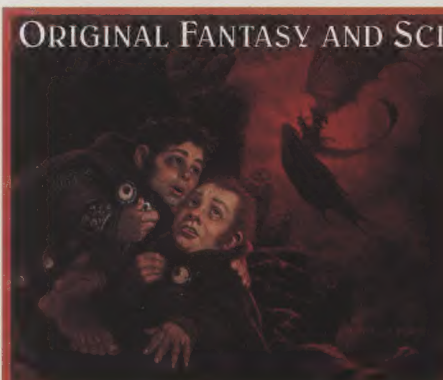
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House Shadow Wolf the newest in reenactment groups and organizations. Founded by a small group of people in Southwest Florida to keep alive that which is fading from modern society. Too many skills have been lost to the "civilization" of man. For the average person on the street the once common skill of candle making or the making of simple clothing is a feat too great for them to comprehend. How many know how to build a simple form of shelter? Chances are, none to just a hand full. Here at House Shadow Wolf we aim to keep those arts and skills alive. We encourage all of our members to learn all that they can of the "ancient ways" and teach them to others before they are lost on the winds of time. Questing to eliminate the ever-present strife from political and organizational problems. House Shadow Wolf prides itself on sticking to the main function of a reenactment group, recreating the past in all ways possible. Some groups hide certain techniques or arts because some of the members may be engaged in a business related to the organization. That is not only shunned here, but forbidden by our guidelines and organization leadership.

All of our Houses' or local groups are founded and governed by the five founding members in that area. These initial five are known as the House Elders, the Elders are responsible for the House as a whole. They make sure that there are Clansmen ready to help new members get adjusted and learn as much as they wish. They are also the main link to the Founding House Elders at ground central in Florida.

House Shadow Wolf is primarily a fighting organization concentrating on three forms of combat covering three distinct periods of time. The first is a Full Armoured Combat, where members, after proving their safety and fighting skills to a House Minister of Battle, can spar and recreate armoured combat. Each member will have access to data to construct or purchase his or her own armour specified in our guidelines. Tribal Combat is our second and most widely used form of combat. The organization itself is themed to a Celtic or Viking based society, but by no means limited to these eras. We welcome all cultures whether they are Arab to Native American. Actually we encourage our members to delve into the least seen cultures, i.e. Aztecs, Native American, African or whatever they choose. The last form of combat is the Classical Rapier, not fencing, but using classical designed weapons as they were meant to be used.

Lastly, this organization was founded for the people and it's members, everyone here has a voice and the Elders and the Clan Chiefs want to hear them. If this sounds like something you would want to be involved in please check out our website at www.houseshadowwolf.com or write to:

House Shadow Wolf



P.O. Box 380476
Murdock, FL 33938-0476

We would love to hear from you and maybe help you to start a House in your area.

In Service to the Clans
The Founding House Elders

Contributors

DEVON MONK is the Alpha female of a four generation household in Salem, Oregon, where she earned a degree in parenting, a fellowship in marriage and a badge of honor in chaos management. Her stories have appeared in *Amazing Stories*, *MZB's Sword and Sorcery*, *Altair*, and a variety of other magazines and anthologies. She would like to thank the coffee industry and the little voices in her head for their support.

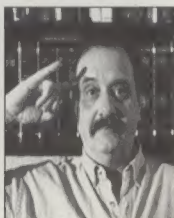
JOHN MONTELEONE has been a diverse and successful illustrator for the past ten years, creating realistic paintings for Time Warner, 20th Century Fox, *Reader's Digest*, and recently Ed Greenwood's *A Kingless Land* for Tor Books and Robert Asprin's *Ripping Time* for Baen Books. John's work can be seen regularly on the covers of *Science Fiction Age* magazine and his paintings are also featured in the new *Spectrum 6*, the best in contemporary fantastic art. John has been a professional Kickboxer and is certified in Bruce Lee's Jeet Jun Do Kickboxing and he is also currently teaching Science Fiction Illustration at the School of Visual Arts in New York city.

DERRYL MURPHY doesn't often write fantasy, but seems bitten by the bug lately. He also doesn't write happy endings very often, yet with both his recent sale to *Realms*, and this piece, you'd think his life was going well or something. Not much new on the lit front, his only major production besides a reprint for the Tor anthology is a second child, expected soon.

JESSICA WYNNE REISMAN has been, among other things, an art house film projectionist, a potion-trader at Renaissance faires, graduate student, wage slave, and studio apprentice. She's had radio plays produced in Austin, Texas, where she currently resides with the requisite cat. Lucky enough to have been the recipient of two fiction fellowships and a member of the Clarion West class of 1995, she is also active in the Fangs of God online workshop. At any given time she is probably at work on a number of projects, which are likely to include short fiction, a screenplay, a novel,



Jessica Wynne Reisman



Walter Velez



J.K. Potter



Devon Monk

and trying to make it rain more.

ERIC A. JOHNSON has sold a fourth Leningrad tale to *The Third Alternative* in the UK. He has been asked to do a regular travelogue feature by editor Andy Cox called "Postcards from Leningrad." It also looks like he's placed a couple more of his "entertainments" in the New York review of Science Fiction. Eric calls "Damsel in Distress" a post-modern fairy tale, and a departure from his Soviet urban fantasies.

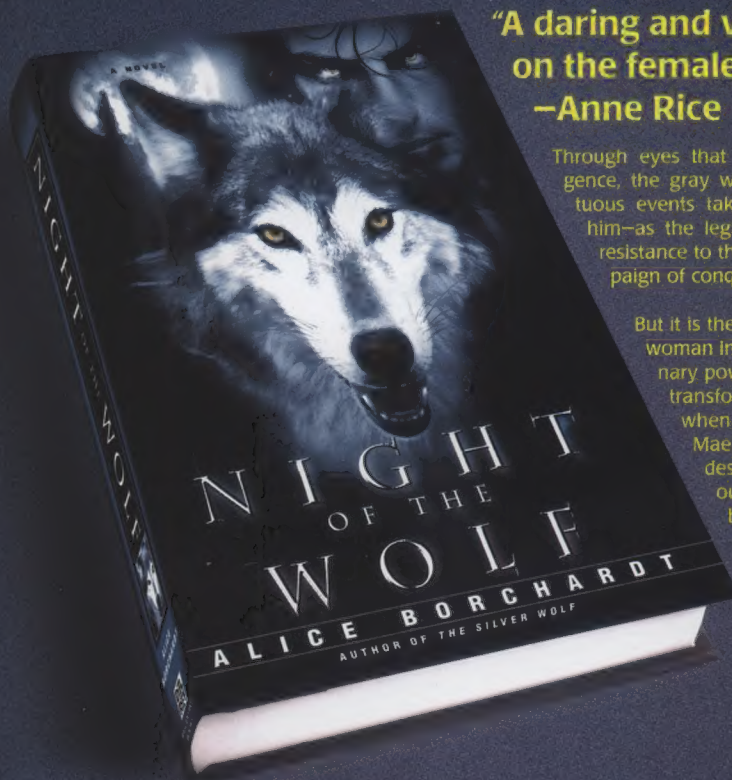
KIJ JOHNSON's most recent sales include a trilogy of *Magic: The Gathering*, short stories published in *The Duelist* magazine, and a fourth story published in the anthology *Rath and Storm*. Kij has just handed a novel *The Fox Woman* in to Tor books, so she has a little more time for short fiction now.

JK POTTER combines art and photography to create stunning images with an intensely dark psychological vision. Potter's art explores the relationship of the body to our deepest obsessions and fears. He often rearranges the human form, sometimes morphing it with animal, vegetable or mineral to suit his imagination. JK's images are created using old fashioned black and white darkroom techniques and are retouched and hand colored. In addition to creating illustrations for such authors as Ray Bradbury, Poppy Z. Brite, Stephen King, and Clive Barker, his designs have appeared in the Randal Kleiser film *Shadow of Doubt*, Brian Yuzna's *Necronomicon: Book of the Dead*, and a forthcoming HBO Films production as yet to be titled.

PATRICK ARRASMITH is living in Brooklyn and attended the California College of Arts and Crafts in San Francisco. Patrick has worked for *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*. His artwork has appeared in *The Society of Illustrator's Annual*, as well as *Step by Step* and *The Village Voice*.

WALTER VELEZ has turned his talents to Goosebumps and to *Dune* collectible trading cards, as well as TSR games and book covers. Velez' artwork is colorful, light-hearted, and witty, often painted on canvas. He is well known for his Thieves World series cover art, and also the Myth series for Robert Asprin. This marks his second appearance in *Realms*. ♣

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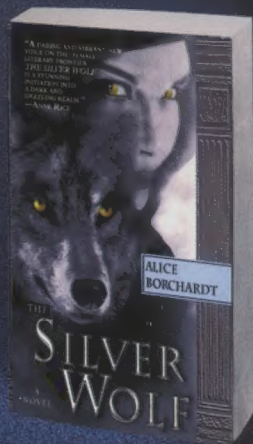
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